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Love the Fight You're In

I'm like any other player when a fight starts. I wait to hear what the DM describes, hinging on the moment when the encounter's foe is fully revealed. Sometimes, my group goes into battle forewarned. We know who or what we'll be facing. Sometimes it's a surprise. And for the most part, I'm not looking forward to facing a particular enemy. I mean, they're monsters. They're trying to kill your character. They're all to be dreaded and despised rather than anticipated.

But there are exceptions. Some enemies bring a certain something to the table. These are the baddies we love to face, the ones that send a little chill down our backs when the mini hits the mat. And not necessarily a chill of fear (although that could certainly be part of it), but of anticipation.

What follows is my list of the top monsters I love to fight. These are the ones that get me to sit forward a little when I see them hit the table. They're presented in no particular order. Also, since I actually thought of several more that I love to fight, I expanded the list in the version of the editorial we're posting on the D&D Insider community page.

Owlbears: Let's get this one out of the way right now. I hate owlbears. I think they're dumb, and I've gone on record with that opinion before. So why do I like to fight 'em? Because each time an owlbear dies, I like to think I've somehow eliminated one from the world, leaving one less owlbear someone else will have to deal with. I know it's stupid, but I can't help myself.

Purple Worms: Really, this could be any monster that burrows around and erupts from the earth to try and swallow you whole. Granted, many monsters are trying to eat your character. But there's a certain fear factor in the idea that this monster actually has mechanics that enable it to do so. Plus, purple worms have the distinction of being one of the few monsters in the game that are almost exclusively reserved for surprise encounters. I don't know about you, but I've never played in a game or campaign where we knew we'd be facing a purple worm. Any time one showed, it was a shock. That sucks a whole new kind of awesome.

Emperor Palpatine: What's that? A Star Wars villain in D&D? No, not really. It's the kind of villain Emperor Palpatine represents that I love to fight. This is the villain who, when you first meet him (or her), you get the feeling he's probably a bad guy. He's not super evil. He doesn't seem to be up to no good. He just rubs you the wrong way. He's probably in a position of power. He might seem to be allied with the forces of good. But through one misguided or duplicitous effort after another, it becomes more and more clear that he's a villain who is thwarting you at every turn. The worst part is that, for some reason, he's untouchable. Then it comes, the moment you've been waiting for. The smokescreen clears, and you finally get to fight this villain *mano y mano*. Few fights are more satisfying than this one.

Beholders: One of the deadliest foes in the game, the beholder embodies, to me, the unpredictable villain. The thing about the beholder is that it encourages a sort of masochistic approach in the players at the table. You find yourself hoping—hoping!—that the beholder is "only" going to hit you with the searing ray or the telekinesis ray rather than the dreaded death or disintegrate rays. That's right, when you fight a beholder, you hope that all it does is deal a massive amount of damage or drop you off a cliff. What a world! But that same unpredictability means that every round is different. To me, no monster brings so much tension to the table, and that makes it a favorite.

Mobs of Minions: This is another category, rather than a specific monster. It includes any large group of popcorn-like monsters. You can't just stop with one, and why should you? Is there anything more viscerally satisfying than dropping a burst 2 area attack on a cluster of minions? I say no.

There's my list. Honorable mention goes to the pit fiend, any dragon, the succubus, and the marilith. I know you've all got your own lists. What are they? What monsters do you just love to fight, and why? Post your lists to the D&D Insider community page or email them to us at dndinsider@wizards.com. We'd love to hear from you!

Shaman Basics: Envoys to the Spirit World

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Sarah Stone

Chanted words suffused the campsite. The quiet, rhythmic murmur drew casual glances from Corben's companions as they cleaned their swords, patched their wounds, and rifled through their packs looking for hardtack. Corben shut out their movements and whispered conversation, focusing his thoughts on his present predicament. They had scoured the swamps for the bullywug encampment, searching with little luck for the villagers abducted for some dark purpose. Their prowling through the swamps had brought them in touch with other predators and vermin, but the hideous croakers remained elusive.

The party had called a halt after fighting back the greenscale lizardfolk that had dogged their steps for days and settled down to regroup and figure out what they had missed. The carcasses stank from their twisted heap a few dozen yards away. Corben pitied them, knowing the conflict could have been avoided had the barbarian been a bit more discerning with that axe of hers. No matter. The damage was done, and Corben had to maintain his focus if he wanted to complete his evocation.

He intensified his chanting until his voice rose above the campsite, silencing his companions' chatter. He gestured to shift his senses into the spirit world, using the primal energies flowing around him to open his eyes to the creeping, twitching, flitting, snarling, and giggling essences drawn by his magic. With his awakened senses, he left behind life's fog to perceive the world's true form, noting the sharpness in the trees, the light dappling on the waters' surface, and the wind's sigh as it played through the tupelo trees. He noticed a swamp cat watching him from the underbrush, curious but unwilling to approach. A snake slithered through the waters, and a bright green frog clung to a leaf. Yet all these revelations could not distract him, because lives depended on the information he would coax from the oft-difficult spirits.

And then, gathered all around, the spirits assembled, their forms running from beautiful to hideous, with some as multicolored motes drifting like dandelion seeds carried on the wind, and others made from mud and twigs, green eyes shining. From such a congress, Corben knew he would learn the villagers' fate and, if they still lived, where he would find them.

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The spirit world is not a place. Instead it is a state of mind—an awareness achieved through training, natural talent, and practice. Reaching the spirit world varies by tradition, with some experiencing its power by whipping themselves up into a frenzy or transforming into a bestial form. Of all those who can commune with the primal spirits, the shaman finds harnessing its power the easiest because he or she needs no tricks to access the spirits. Spirits remain with them or near them, lending advice, fighting on their behalf, and answering their call whenever and wherever the shaman travels.

The Basics

"You have it backward: The spirits do not serve me, but rather I serve the spirits."

Shamans draw primal energy from the spirit world to commune with the spirits and gain assistance in overcoming the perils and enemies arrayed against them. Standing at the crossroads of two worlds, the shaman acts as a doorway through which the primal spirits emerge to affect change in the world. A shaman's evocations bring forth mighty protectors, shield allies and innocents alike against the enemy, and create deadly hunters whose fearsome aspect and razor-sharp claws seed terror in all who behold them. Shamans use their magic to support their allies, giving them new strength, speeding their recovery, and changing their circumstances to find swift victory. Yet a shaman is more than a healing reservoir; shamans can step into other roles, from controller to striker, as needed.

Race

When you decide on the shaman class, you should pick a race to play. Look to ability adjustments to help pare down the list. Put races boosting Wisdom at the top followed by races offering boosts to Dexterity, Intelligence, or Constitution. If you're interested in dealing higher damage, consider Wisdom and Intelligence. If you'd like to let your allies attack on your behalf and make hard-to-reach enemies vulnerable, think about Wisdom and Dexterity. Wisdom and Constitution are important abilities for shamans who focus on healing and defending or those with a controller bent. Of course, you should never ignore racial traits since they can compensate for partial ability score matches or mismatches.

Abilities

Wisdom, given its key function in your attack powers, is your most important ability. As an implement-wielder, you should consider having an 18 here, even if it means robbing points from your secondary abilities or preventing you from investing in a tertiary ability. Your secondary ability helps realize your build features. Secondary defenders and controllers need Constitution, and strikers need Intelligence or Dexterity. Place at least a 14 in either of these (which is all you can afford with an average or challenging race).

Your tertiary ability isn't all that important, but you're best off investing your points in an ability that can build up a low defense and that is also an ability favored by the shaman class. So if Wisdom is primary, Constitution is secondary, then go with Dexterity for your tertiary (choose Dexterity over Intelligence for the boost to your initiative).

Advantaged Race Combination: 17, 14, 14, 10, 10, 8
Good Race Combination: 16, 16, 13, 11, 10, 8
Average Race Combination: 18, 13, 13, 10, 10, 8
Challenging Race Combination: 18, 14, 11, 10, 10, 8

RACE AND BUILD

Race	Suggested Build
Advantaged Combinations	
Deva	Panther shaman
Dwarf	Bear shaman
Elf	Watcher shaman
Githzerai	Watcher shaman
Razorclaw shifter	Watcher shaman
Shardmind	Panther shaman
Wilden	World spirit shaman
Good Combinations	
Human	Any build
Kalashtar	World spirit shaman
Longtooth shifter	Bear shaman
Average Combinations	
Changeling	Panther shaman
Drow	Watcher shaman
Eladrin	Watcher shaman
Genasi	Panther shaman
Gnome	Panther shaman
Goliath	Bear shaman
Half-elf	Bear shaman
Half-orc	Watcher shaman
Halfling	Watcher shaman
Minotaur	Bear shaman
Revenant	Panther shaman
Shadar-kai	Watcher shaman
Tiefling	Panther shaman
Warforged	Bear shaman
Challenging Combinations	
Dragonborn	Bear shaman

Companion Spirit

Your most important and distinctive class feature is your Companion Spirit. With it, you can call forth a spirit through which you can make attacks and aid your friends. Because of the power it brings to your role, mastering its use should be your priority.

Companion Spirit Fundamentals

The Companion Spirit is a deceptively simple feature. For a minor action, you can drop the spirit companion in any unoccupied square inside a close burst 10 using the *call spirit companion* power. Since it's a burst, you don't need to worry about seeing the square, but you do need to have line of effect to that square. Essentially, your spirit companion shows up pretty much wherever you want on most battlefields. Your spirit companion is a conjuration (see *Player's Handbook 2*, page 220), and as such it follows the conjuration rules with a few exceptions as shown below.

Occupies 1 Square: Your spirit companion occupies a single square. Your allies can move through its space, but your enemies cannot. Allies entering its space must end their moves in unoccupied squares.

Unaffected by the Environment: The spirit companion ignores terrain and environmental phenomena. It also does not need to be supported by a solid surface. This means when it moves, it ignores difficult terrain and can move vertically and horizontally.

Attacking your Spirit Companion: Your spirit companion can be attacked by melee and ranged attacks, and it uses your defenses. It ignores close and area attacks as well as damaging melee and ranged attacks that do not deal at least 10 + one-half your level damage. Should the conjuration take this damage, it vanishes, and you take 5 + one-half level damage. The damage you take from losing your spirit companion is rather small compared to the triggering damage, so don't be skittish about putting your spirit companion in harm's way.

Attacking with your Spirit Companion: The *call spirit companion* power does not have any built-in attack powers. Instead, your spirit companion attacks when you use shaman powers with the spirit keyword. You determine line of sight and line of effect from your spirit companion's space, which is also the spirit power's origin square. Your spirit companion has no special vision traits and relies on your vision traits to see. So, if you are in a totally obscured square and your spirit companion is not, you can make an attack using a spirit attack power at no penalty. If you are blinded from an attack, however, then you take the penalty whether or not you use a spirit attack.

Moving your Spirit Companion: Whenever you take a move action, you can move your spirit companion a number of squares equal to your speed. So if you run 8 squares, and your speed is 6, your spirit companion moves 6 squares. Any move action you spend allows the spirit companion to move, even if you spend a move action to walk 0 squares.

Sometimes 6 or so squares isn't enough to get your spirit companion into position. You can always dismiss the spirit companion as a minor action, and then drop your move action to gain another minor action and use it to conjure the spirit companion again. This should be your standard procedure whenever you need to move your spirit companion more squares than your speed.

Beware of standard actions that allow movement, such as charge attack. These are *not* move actions, so your spirit companion stays put. If it's vital to put your spirit companion into position, spend your move action first or just dismiss and conjure it again.

Although exceptions exist, the spirit companion is still bound by the normal conjuration rules. You can't move it through a solid obstacle (blocking terrain). If you end your turn with the spirit companion more than 20 squares away from you, it goes away.

Ending the Conjuration: Your conjuration ends if you die, if you spend a minor action to dismiss it, if you end your turn with the spirit companion out of range, or if your conjuration takes damage greater than 10 + one-half level from a single attack (in which case you take damage).

Choosing a Spirit

Companion Spirits come in different varieties, each reflecting a different aspect of the spirit world. You choose one Companion Spirit from the options provided: the Protector Spirit and Stalker Spirit from *Player's Handbook 2*, and the Watcher Spirit and World Speaker Spirit from *Primal Power*. Each spirit type reinforces a secondary role through mechanical features. Each option provides a spirit boon and a spirit opportunity attack power, and each sets one of your two at-will attack powers.

Protector Spirit and the Bear Shaman

"The spirits guard those who champion their interests."

The protector spirit shields your allies from harm by speeding recovery from injuries sustained in battle. Your spirit companion allows them to regain extra hit points when they use second wind while adjacent to your companion. The powers associated with the protector spirit continue the theme by letting adjacent allies regain hit points or by bestowing temporary hit points on your friends. Your protector spirit is at its best when assigned to a defender or melee striker, especially paladins, battleminds, swordmages, and rogues. Keep the spirit companion positioned between these allies to cast the widest net when you use *spirit shield* and *protecting strike*.

Secondary Role: Defender
Key Abilities: Wisdom, Constitution

Stalker Spirit and the Panther Shaman

"The spirits are angry, friend; too bad there's nowhere you can run where they won't find you."

The great cat form worn by the stalker spirit symbolizes its savage cunning and terrible fury, which are traits you can use to destroy your enemies. The stalker spirit is all aggression, all the time. It fights against your will, struggling to break free and slake its thirst on your enemies' blood. Your spirit companion urges your allies to bring down the foes quickly, lending strength to their attacks against bloodied opponents, while keeping its claws at the ready so it can strike quickly should it get an opening. The stalker spirit companion thrives in the thick of things, attacking anything it can reach, but it is best when used to put down bloodied opponents quickly, thus freeing up your allies to move on to the next foes. Stalker spirits are great companions for defenders and melee strikers, especially with those who can take care of their own healing, such as battlerager fighters, most paladins, and barbarians. Use this spirit companion to dart in and finish off enemies or to lead the attack against more powerful foes.

Secondary Role: Striker
Key Abilities: Wisdom, Intelligence

Watcher Spirit and the Eagle Shaman

"The spirits see all—your fears and your weakness made manifest in your corruption."

The watcher spirit emerges from the spirit world wearing the form of a predatory bird, usually an eagle, and seeks out enemies hiding behind the front ranks. The watcher spirit slips through the enemies and takes position next to an enemy leader, controller, or artillery, denying them cover from their allies and exposing them to your and your allies' attacks. Enemies adjacent to your spirit companion also count as the nearest enemy for your allies, thus setting up rangers, warlocks, and many other ranged characters. Many powers associated with the watcher spirit allow allies to attack on your behalf, making this an excellent build option if you are lagging behind in Wisdom.

Secondary Role: Striker
Key Abilities: Wisdom, Dexterity

World Speaker Spirit and the World Speaker Shaman

"This world is illusion, and as such, I can shape it in whatever way I wish."

As a world speaker shaman, your spirit companion is the world itself, emerging from your environment as a form shaped from earth, stone, moss, wood, flickering flames, or a screaming wind. The world speaker spirit is hard to ignore, because it can ensnare enemies when they try to move away while also helping allies move into position where they can be most effective. The world speaker build provides defender and controller elements, giving you a great deal more versatility than is available to other shamans. You pair well with any character class, but this option is best for shamans in groups already benefitting from other leader classes.

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Healing Spirit

Shamans have *healing spirit* to help allies spend healing surges beyond their second wind. *Healing spirit* is similar to the "word" powers possessed by other leaders, but it is a bit trickier to use effectively. Rather than boosting the hit points your target regains for spending a healing surge, you instead let an ally adjacent to your spirit companion regain hit points, thus letting you attend to two allies at once. Where this can become difficult is when only one ally needs the healing or when your spirit companion is too far away to give the right character the needed hit points. Since your spirit companion is integral to making this power work for you, positioning is everything. Keep your spirit companion near the front line where it can

flood a defender or melee striker with hit points. If your spirit companion is destroyed, don't sweat it. You can always use *healing spirit* to let yourself regain hit points and heal an ally adjacent to your spirit at the same time. If the monsters aren't taking the bait, you will need to stay within 5 squares of your front rank allies, because *healing spirit's* area never increases.

Speak with Spirits

The last power shamans receive is the story-rich *speak with spirits*. With this power, you get a considerable boost to one skill check. This makes the power particularly handy during skill challenges, especially when you would make a check using a skill in which you do not have training.

Choosing Powers

Because your Companion Spirit feature assigns one power, you choose only three powers at character creation (aside from half-elves and humans, of course). Each level, you need to make a choice between a power your spirit companion will use and a power you can use directly. Rely too much on spirit powers and you'll leave yourself exposed when an enemy strikes from an unexpected direction, catching you without a defender for protection. Starve your spirit and your sexy class feature becomes nothing more than a complicated way to fulfill your role obligations.

A balanced approach might be the answer, since it means a diversified arsenal, but don't be seduced by the easy way out. Other factors might suggest an extreme approach. If you are ranged-attack heavy, you want spirit powers to buy time for your allies to destroy the enemies from afar. On the other hand, a spirit companion can get in your allies' way if they are mostly melee types, so you might want to have ranged power on hand to support them from behind. Finally, if you're a second leader, consider devoting more attention to your secondary role and pick powers in support of it.

Bear Shamans

As a bear shaman, look for powers that heal or mitigate your enemies' attacks. Finding these powers is pretty easy, since they usually involve Constitution in some way.

You receive *protecting strike* (*Player's Handbook 2*, page 121) from your Companion Spirit. The free temporary hit points it hands out to your allies should make it a staple in your arsenal. *Player's Handbook 2* recommends *defending strike* (same page) for your second power, and it's not a bad choice. It grants a boost to your allies' AC as long as they stay next to your spirit companion. However, look at *voice of battle* (*Primal Power*, page 66). Instead of granting a defense boost, it allows a nearby ally to maneuver into position or escape a threatening enemy. Furthermore, the power targets Will, a typically low defense. If you don't mind the lower damage, this is worth considering.

For your encounter power, several powers stand out. *Thunder bear's warding* (*Player's Handbook 2*, page 122) hands out resistance to all damage and bestows temporary hit points to you or a nearby ally. Both *call to the ancestral warrior* and *call to the ancient defender* (same page for each) give defense boosts, the former to all defenses but with low damage, the latter to all defenses against opportunity attacks and with pretty good damage. Although all three are serviceable, *certain threat* (*Primal Power*, page 66) might be a better option, especially to fill in as a secondary defender. The power deals solid damage and the penalty to attack rolls from the mark it bestows should be -3 or worse (assuming a 14 Con), effectively translating into a +3 bonus to all allies' defenses against the target's attacks without requiring your allies to stay next to your spirit companion.

Eagle Shamans

Your Third Power

If you're playing a human, you receive a third at-will power. Consider the following recommended powers to fill this slot.

Bear Shaman: *defending strike* or *voice of battle*

Eagle Shaman: *defending strike* or *wrath of winter*

Panther Shaman: *claws of the eagle* or *voice of battle*

World Speaker Shaman: *spirit of the tempest* or *wrath of winter*

Eagle shamans receive *claws of the eagle* (*Primal Power*, page 66), and it's a good one, too. What makes this power sing is that it allows another character to make an attack on your behalf and, on a hit, gives combat advantage to all your allies. *Primal Power* suggests *watcher's strike* (*Player's Handbook 2*, page 121) for your second power. That, too, is good advice. It marries well thematically, deals solid damage, and grants an untyped +1 bonus to attack rolls to you and all allies adjacent to your spirit companion. Plus, the boost to Perception checks isn't bad, either.

Any eagle shaman with a good Dexterity score should take *stormhawk's fury* (*Primal Power,* page 67). Not only does it maneuver your spirit companion to where it can be most effective, it also deals extra lightning damage each time the target is hit by an ally's attack. The damage output is potentially huge, but you'd better make sure your friends focus fire. If your Dexterity is low or if you have a controller with a penchant for area attacks, *spirits of mountain mist* (*Primal Power,* page 67) might be a better choice. It deals awesome damage for its level and also provides a much-needed accuracy boost for implement wielders who use area and close attacks.

Panther Shamans

As a panther shaman, you receive *stalker's strike* (*Player's Handbook 2,* page 121). It should be your go-to power throughout the heroic tier. It deals the highest damage of any at-will attack power and also allows allies to flank with your spirit companion. As attractive as the option is, the ally flanking with your spirit companion isn't going to benefit from your spirit boon, so keep this in mind. For your second at-will, look at *wrath of winter.* It delivers an impressive d10 damage and teleports your spirit companion into a space adjacent to the target. The appeal is somewhat dampened by the fact that you can dismiss and reconjure your companion for two minor actions, but for a quick battlefield adjustment or when you're dazed, you can't go wrong here.

Twin panthers (*Player's Handbook 2,* page 122) is recommended for your encounter power, and you could do far worse. It has a modest range and it relies on two attack rolls to deal expected damage, but if you hold this power back until late in the encounter when you have more bloodied enemies, it's rarely wasted. *Ironbreaker claws* (*Primal Power,* page 66) is a good alternative since it allows a potentially high-damage ally to fill in for your second attack. It also is flexible, since it's tied to your spirit companion. The ally's attack requires that you hit with the initial attack, putting the burden squarely on your shoulders. This power is a good choice.

World Speaker Shamans

Control and defense are the world speaker shaman's hallmarks. You receive *voice of battle* (*Primal Power,* page 66) from your Companion Spirit, and it's a good standby. It allows allies to maneuver into position to flank, to escape soldiers, and to move out from enemy control zones. *Primal Power* suggests *protecting strike* for your second power, and this is a good match too, since your Constitution should be in good shape. You might also consider *spirit of the tempest* to help insulate your allies against devastating conditions or *wrath of winter* to put your spirit companion where you need it.

Primal Power recommends *bramble ally* (page 66) for the world spirit shaman. It's a good choice for a control attack. The power allows you to hit a nearby enemy and in doing so transform your spirit companion into a control zone. It's pretty good for most shamans, but as a world speaker shaman you can immobilize distant enemies for a round. Better still, the rider doesn't depend on a secondary ability.

Daily Evocations

You have a great deal more freedom when it comes to choosing your daily power, since these powers aren't overtly tied to your secondary role and none depend on secondary abilities.

***Blessing of the Seven Winds* (*Player's Handbook 2,* page 122):** Solid damage output combined with a control zone on the target's space makes *blessing of the seven winds* a strong choice for any shaman. The zone is self-sustaining and moves around when you spend a move action. This power works best against Large and larger creature since the zone grows with the target's size. Use this power early; its benefits last throughout the encounter.

***Cleansing Wind of the North* (*Player's Handbook 2,* page 122):** The main attraction to this power is its ability to remove conditions and ongoing damage by allowing a saving throw with a huge bonus. If you choose this power, don't use it for damage (that's a perk). Save it for the second or third round when the enemies have blown through their encounter powers.

***Great Watcher Spirit* (*Primal Power,* page 67):** Range and versatility make this power an attractive option, but it's worth remembering that though this can allow two allies to make basic attacks, thus letting a sorcerer unleash hell on an enemy, it also has no effect on a miss. The power denies enemies from gaining combat advantage against allies adjacent to your spirit companion, and that helps somewhat, but this power can work for you only if your allies have high-damage basic attacks. If you choose this power, use it early and when you're facing enemies who spike their damage with combat advantage.

***Spirit Cascade* (*Primal Power,* page 67):** *Spirit cascade* does acceptable damage, but it's all or nothing. The effect line is extremely powerful, granting significant damage spikes to allies adjacent to your spirit companion. Be careful using this power: It's strong against solos, but it loses efficacy when enemies swarm you.

***Spirit of Grief's Shadow* (*Primal Power*, page 67):** It might not deal damage on a hit, but when combined with the immobilized condition, it can provide a frustrating end to just about any enemy. Keep your spirit companion adjacent to the enemy for as long as possible to keep the penalty to saving throws running; the best way is to pair this with a tough fighter.

***Spirit of the Healing Flood* (*Player's Handbook 2*, page 122):** If you are the only leader in your group, give this power a look. Not only do you hand out regeneration to bloodied allies, but you're also giving your allies a free *potion of healing*. Use this power early so you can catch all your allies in the burst and so that the regeneration kicks on when it's needed.

***Spray of Quills* (*Primal Power*, page 67):** A dangerous power for only the most aggressive shamans, *spray of quills* covers an incredible area and deals impressive damage, but it comes at the expense of allies in the burst and no effect on a miss. If you choose this power, you will have few opportunities to use it without catching your allies in the blast.

***Stone Root Spirit* (*Primal Power*, page 67):** Great for shamans looking for control. The power does not deal damage, but it removes enemies while also giving your allies protection. Reserve this power for when enemies swarm you, especially when these enemies have artillery support.

***Wrath of the Spirit World* (*Player's Handbook 2*, page 122):** With great damage and great coverage (it hits enemies in a burst 2 and enemies adjacent to your spirit companion), *wrath of the spirit world* might be one of the best control and striker powers available to shamans. This power is a great option in groups where the shaman acts as the second leader.

Skills and Feats

Picking skills and feats might be easy compared to power selection, but they do warrant some consideration. For skills, you get Nature and your pick of three others. Skill selection should reflect your character's personality, racial and background bonuses, and party composition. Talk with your fellow players to figure out which skills aren't covered in the group and give them the closest consideration. Having them will give you a chance to contribute outside of combat.

For feats, Implement Expertise is the obvious choice. Implement wielders lag two to three points behind weapon-users in attack modifiers, though non-AC defenses are two to three points lower than AC. But an extra +1 bonus to attacks is pretty awesome. This said, the feat doesn't start becoming important until about 4th level, so you can wait on it if you'd rather develop other areas first. Shaman feats are a great place to start looking, especially when they improve your *healing spirit* power. Shared Healing Spirit (*Player's Handbook 2*) loosens the restrictions on who benefits from the additional hit points and Rejuvenating Spirit (*Primal Power*) grants a saving throw with the same power. Sudden Call (*Primal Power*) is a crucial feat since it lets you use *call spirit companion* as a free action.

New Shaman Evocations

The new evocations presented here provide new choices to complement shaman class features and the leader role as you advance in level.

Spirit's Sacrifice — Shaman Utility 2

Seeing an ally in need, you sacrifice your spirit companion to give your ally a needed boost.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Spirit
Minor Action **Close** burst spirit 5
Target: You or one ally in burst.
Effect: You dismiss the spirit companion and the target makes a saving throw or gains temporary hit points equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Winter's Thaw — Shaman Attack 3

Fire blossoms in your spirit companion and sends flaming cinders into the air to relax winter's bitter grasp.

Encounter ✦ Fire, Implement, Primal, Spirit, Zone
Standard Action **Melee** spirit 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier fire damage.
Effect: Center a burst 2 on your spirit companion. The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Any ally that starts its turn in the zone and is slowed, immobilized, or taking ongoing cold damage makes a saving throw. On a success, one of those conditions ends.

Remembrance of Hate — Shaman Attack 5

The spirits recall the ancient offenses done to the world and vent their hatred through claw and fang.

Daily ✦ Implement, Primal, Spirit, Zone
Standard Action **Close** burst spirit 1
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and you push the target 1 square from your spirit companion.
Effect: The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter or until your spirit companion is no longer present in the encounter. Any creature starting its turn in the zone takes 3 damage and you push the target 1 square from your spirit companion.

Primal Investiture — Shaman Utility 6

You merge your spirit companion with an ally to grow his or her strength.

Daily ✦ Primal, Spirit
Minor Action **Area** burst 5 centered on spirit companion
Target: You or one ally.
Effect: You dismiss the spirit companion and you cannot use *call spirit companion* until the end of your next turn. The target can spend a healing surge and gains a +1 power bonus to attack rolls and a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of the encounter.

Emerald Lure — Shaman Attack 7

Bright emerald motes fill the air around your spirit companion and lure your enemies to the companion.

Encounter ✦ Implement, Primal, Spirit
Standard Action **Close** burst spirit 2
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + Wisdom modifier damage, and you pull the target 1 square toward your spirit companion. You dismiss your spirit companion.

Enraged Spirit — Shaman Attack 9

Your spirit companion warps and writhes until it becomes something monstrous—a vision of vengeance.

Daily ✦ Primal, Spirit
Minor Action **Ranged** 20
Primary Target: Your spirit companion
Effect: Your spirit companion transforms into the spirit of vengeance until the end of the encounter or until your spirit companion is no longer present in the encounter. While in this form, your spirit companion gains resist 5 to all damage, and you can make the following at-will implement attack against a secondary target.
Standard Action **Melee** spirit 1
Secondary Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d12 + Wisdom modifier damage, and if the secondary target deals any damage before the end of your next turn, it takes 1d12 extra damage.

Call Forth the Spirit World — Shaman Utility 10

Your enemies cannot bear the spirit world's wonder, but your allies find themselves reinvigorated.

Encounter ✦ Fear, Healing, Primal, Spirit, Zone
Minor Action **Close** burst spirit 3
Effect: The burst becomes a zone until the end of your next turn or until your spirit companion is destroyed. The zone moves with the spirit companion, remaining centered on its space. Enemies within the zone take a -2 penalty to attack rolls. Any bloodied ally that starts its turn within the zone regains 5 hit points.
Sustain Minor: The effect persists.

Harvest Reaping — Shaman Attack 13

Vengeful spirits hold your enemy fast to steal its strength for your allies to use.

Encounter ✦ Implement, Primal, Spirit
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + Wisdom modifier damage, and you knock the target prone.
Effect: Whenever you use *healing spirit* before the end of your next turn, each ally adjacent to your spirit companion gains a +2 power bonus to melee damage rolls until the end of his or her next turn.

Spiritual Congress — Shaman Utility 16

Calling forth the spirits to gain their wisdom, you bind them to you so their aid continues for a time.

Daily ✦ Primal, Spirit
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, after using *speak with spirits* you regain the use of *speak with spirits* at the end of your next turn.

Winter's End — Shaman Attack 17

Winter flees the fires wreathing your spirit companion, bringing new hope and zeal to the allies bathed in its glow.

Encounter ✦ Fire, Implement, Primal, Spirit, Zone
Standard Action **Close** burst spirit 2
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier fire damage.
Effect: The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Any ally that starts its turn in the zone and is slowed, immobilized, or taking ongoing cold damage makes a saving throw for each such condition. On a success, that condition ends.

Spirit of Endings Begun — Shaman Attack 19

Darkness swirls out from your spirit companion, eroding your enemies' defenses and stealing their life.

Daily ✦ Implement, Primal, Spirit, Zone
Standard Action **Close** burst spirit 2
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + Wisdom modifier damage. The target takes ongoing 5 damage and a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage, and you push the target 1 square from your spirit companion.
Effect: The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter or until your spirit companion is no longer present in the encounter. Any creature that starts its turn in the zone takes 5 damage and you push the target 1 square from your spirit companion.

Beguiling Call — Shaman Attack 23

Drawn by your spirit companion's inviting aspect, your foes soon learn their error when it strikes.

Encounter ✦ Implement, Primal, Psychic, Spirit
Standard Action **Close** burst spirit 2
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier psychic damage. You pull the target 1 square toward your spirit companion, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn. You dismiss your spirit companion.

Spirit of Destruction Shaman Attack 25

The ground trembles as your spirit companion gathers power to complete its transformation into destruction incarnate. Where it goes, ruin follows.

Daily ✦ Implement, Primal, Spirit
Minor Action **Ranged** 20
Target: Your spirit companion
Effect: Your spirit companion transforms into the spirit of destruction until the end of the encounter, until you dismiss it, or until it is destroyed. While in this form, your spirit companion gains resist 10 to all damage, and you can make the following at-will implement attack against a secondary target.
Standard Action **Melee** spirit 3
Secondary Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d12 + Wisdom modifier damage. You push the secondary target 2 squares away from your spirit companion, and you knock the target prone.

Deep Roots Shaman Attack 27

Green shoots sprout up from the earth and bind your foes in place. Where they hold your enemy, they drain away strength and bestow it onto your allies.

Encounter ✦ Healing, Implement, Primal
Standard Action **Close** blast 3
Target: Each enemy in blast
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is immobilized and weakened until the end of your next turn.
Effect: Whenever you use *healing spirit* before the end of your next turn, each ally adjacent to your spirit companion gains a +5 power bonus to melee damage rolls until the end of his or her next turn.

Shaman Feats

The following feats expand on those presented in *Player's Handbook 2* and *Primal Power*.

Heroic Tier Feats

Feats in this section are available to characters of any level who meet the prerequisites.

Aggressive Spirit

Prerequisite: Shaman

Benefit: Whenever you reduce an enemy to 0 hit points with a spirit attack power, you can teleport your spirit companion 10 squares to a square adjacent to an enemy as a free action.

Ancient Wisdom

Prerequisite: Wilden, shaman, *voyage of the ancients* power

Benefit: When you use *voyage of the ancients*, the enemy you choose also grants combat advantage to each ally adjacent to your spirit companion until the end of your next turn.

Bloodthirsty Spirit

Prerequisite: Shaman, Watcher Spirit class feature

Benefit: Each ally making a ranged basic attack triggered by your *spirit's prey* power gains a +2 power bonus to the damage roll.

Inciting Spirit

Prerequisite: Razorclaw shifter, *razorclaw shifting* racial power, shaman, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: When you use *razorclaw shifting*, until the end of the encounter any ally that starts its turn in a square adjacent to your spirit companion gains a +1 power bonus to speed until the start of the ally's next turn.

Intolerable Command

Prerequisite: Shaman, World Speaker Spirit class feature

Benefit: Creatures hit by your *world speaker's command* power are also deafened and slowed until the end of your next turn.

Linked Spirit

Prerequisite: Shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power, shaman, telepathy, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: You can use telepathy to communicate wordlessly with any creature within 5 squares of you or 5 squares of your spirit companion that has a language.

In addition, when you use your *shard swarm* power, you can teleport to exchange positions with your spirit companion instead of the teleport the power normally grants.

Mobile Spirit

Prerequisite: Shaman

Benefit: When you take a move action, you can also move your spirit companion a number of squares equal to your speed + 4.

Otherworldly Accuracy

Prerequisite: Elf, *elven accuracy* racial power, shaman, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: When you use *elven accuracy* to reroll an attack roll for a shaman spirit attack and that attack hits, each ally adjacent to your spirit companion gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls against the target until the start of your next turn.

Spirit's Bulwark

Prerequisite: Shaman, Protector Spirit class feature, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: Whenever an attack against your spirit companion causes the spirit to disappear, one ally adjacent to it gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of the encounter or until you next use *call spirit companion*.

Spirit's Guidance

Prerequisite: Shaman, Watcher Spirit class feature, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: Whenever an attack against your spirit companion causes the spirit to disappear, one ally adjacent to it gains combat advantage against the creature who made the attack until the end of the encounter or until you next use *call spirit companion*.

Spirit's Rebuke

Prerequisite: Shaman, World Speaker Spirit class feature, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: Whenever an attack against your spirit companion causes the spirit to disappear, the creature who made the attack becomes slowed until the end of the encounter or until you next use *call spirit companion*.

Spirit's Revenge

Prerequisite: Shaman, Stalker Spirit class feature, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: Whenever an attack against your spirit companion causes the spirit to disappear, one ally adjacent to it gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls against the creature who made the attack until the end of the encounter or until you next use *call spirit companion*.

Stubborn Spirit

Prerequisite: Dwarf, shaman, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: When an ally adjacent to your spirit companion is subjected to forced movement, you can dismiss your spirit companion as a free action. This lets you reduce the number of squares the ally would be forcibly moved by a number equal to your Constitution modifier.

Paragon Tier Feats

A character must be at least 11th level to select either of the feats in this section.

Revelation of the Spirit

Prerequisite: 11th level, shaman, Watcher Spirit class feature

Benefit: Enemies hit by your shaman spirit attacks cannot benefit from cover or concealment (though they still benefit from superior cover or total concealment) until the start of your next turn.

Wholesome Spirit

Prerequisite: Deva, Astral Resistance racial feature, shaman, *call spirit companion* power

Benefit: Your spirit companion gains necrotic and radiant resistance equal to that granted by your Astral Resistance racial feature.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Player's Handbook 3*, *Martial Power 2*, and *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons* and in the pages of both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* Magazines. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Playing Shardminds

By Bruce R. Cordell
Illustrations by Wayne England

Crystalline fragments in constant, silent motion create a body in which a psionic consciousness nestles.

The Living Gate once stood at the pinnacle of the intricate lattice of the Astral Sea. Sealed beyond it lay the alien Far Realm. The gate's destruction during the Dawn War allowed the influence of that terrifying realm to seep into the worlds, and it ultimately resulted in the rise of the mind flayer empire. From the fragments of that shattered gate rose self-assembled shardminds.

Shardminds, constructs of crystallized psionic consciousness, are individual beings. Despite their common origin in the Living Gate's destruction, each shardmind has its own set of aspirations, its own personality, and its own goals. Some are curious, others aloof, and a few have gone "bad."

For the most part, shardminds are decent people, despite the race's reputation for being dispassionate and emotionally distant.

However, no matter an individual shardmind's personality, nearly all believe they are formed from the scattered fragments of the original Living Gate. This knowledge has put an onus on many shardminds who believe that, one way or another, they should take up again their ancient task and seal away once and for all the malign presence of the alien abominations of the Far Realm.

To be a shardmind is to always be apart and different from other creatures, except for other shardminds.

Shardminds in Player's Handbook 3

This article draws and expands upon the shardmind introduction in *Player's Handbook 3*. Refer to that source to discover a shardmind's basic racial abilities (such as telepathy, crystalline mind, shard swarm, and so on), as well as basic information on a shardmind's physical qualities, common names, initial backgrounds, and shardmind-specific feats. This article also provides a few more directions and opportunities for your shardmind character.

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Shardmind Personality

Your first conscious thoughts were of gathering and of coalescence; your mind came together as your body formed into a construction of fragments. You had enough consciousness to recognize yourself as an individual, but it was a years-long slog for you to reach your current level of knowledge and understanding of your nature.

As a construct of self-assembled crystal shards, your grasp on the subtleties of a regular living creature's basic drives and motivations is academic at best. You've seen them yearn after each other, make irrational decisions apparently based on unrealistic expectations, frequently having to do with enticements of love, attraction, and a version of courtship.

It seems like a lot distracting bother to you. Of course you feel the bonds of friendship, the pull of duty, and the importance of your sworn word; you *feel*. But thank the Once and Future Gate that you are not burdened with the underlying emotions that surge through even the most noble and well-intentioned human. The mental battle between reason and emotion is one in which you need not engage.

However, because you've never experienced being rejected by the "object of your affection," you can't help but react with a bemused stare when your companions accidentally confide in you after having one too many drinks of fermented plant matter. What they talk about is a little bit beyond you. On a related note, you lack the ability to become happily impaired by substances that can throw hardy dwarves for a loop.

So you compensate by living a life that makes sense to you. You assemble principles and live by them. Your philosophy is well-developed, since so few things distract you from deep thought. And once you have your principles in order, you strive to keep your existence in accord with them.

Then you were probably amazed when, upon finding your principles compromised by others, the storm of . . . emotion? Yes, emotion. What other word could contain the blaze of your thoughts, the nearly unthinking speed of your reactions, when your principles were challenged? Something touched you, as it does with any breathing organism. The revelation impacted you greatly, and it gave you more insight into the minds of the creatures with which you share the world. And satisfaction, too; just like your living companions, you are also capable of passion.

Shardmind Philosophy

No one told you that you were once part of a far grander entity called the Living Gate. The knowledge slowly revealed itself to you over the years since your awakening. What started as an odd feeling and strange glimpses of a shining expanse of crystal eventually became an incontrovertible fact.

How you react to that knowledge can say a lot about you. You've sensed the presence of other shardminds, and all of them apparently share the goal of rebuilding the Gate. But it seems no two shardminds agree on exactly how to accomplish that goal. Some would rather see a completely new gate built, others believe that the Living Gate remains, just in a distributed state composed of various shardminds, while others believe it is their duty at the end of their existence to give up their crystal fragments so that the Gate can live once more.

Where do you come down on the question of the Living Gate? Is it something you think about every day, or is it a facet of your life that you acknowledge without thinking about it, just like you give little thought to the fact that the sky is blue?

Shardmind Feats

Shardminds have a number of feats specific to their unique forms, as well as access to those tied to their fundamental psionic nature and immortal origin.

Heroic Tier Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisites.

Crystalline Auger

Prerequisite: Shardmind, psionic class

Benefit: Your attacks ignore the first 5 points of psychic resistance. This increases to 10 points at 11th level, and to 15 points at 21st level.

Daunting Swarm

Prerequisite: Shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: You can choose to mark any creature you affect with the *shard swarm* power until the end of your next turn.

Distant Swarm

Prerequisite: Shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: When you use your *shard swarm*, you can choose to make the range of the power into an area burst 1 within 5 squares instead of a close burst 1. If you do so, the square you teleport into as a part of this power must be within the area of the burst.

Mineral Resilience

Prerequisite: Shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: When you use *shard swarm*, you gain 5 temporary hit points. This increases to 15 temporary hit points at 21st level.

Myriad Crystal Eyes

Prerequisite: Shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: When you use *shard swarm*, until the end of your next turn no creature can benefit from concealment from you.

We Were Once One

Prerequisite: Shardmind

Benefit: When you spend a healing surge, each ally within your telepathy range can make a saving throw as a free action.

Paragon Tier Feats

Feats in this section are available to any characters of 11th level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Buffeting Shard Swarm

Prerequisite: 11th level, shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: When you use *shard swarm*, you can also slide each enemy in the burst 1 square.

Perfect Fracture

Prerequisite: 11th level, shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: You can use your *shard swarm* racial power as an immediate reaction when you become bloodied.

Shard Construct

Prerequisite: 11th level, shardmind

Benefit: You gain resist poison equal to 5 + one-half your level.

Epic Tier Feats

Feats in this section are available to any characters of 21st level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Expanded Shard Swarm

Prerequisite: 21st level, shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: The size of the burst of your *shard swarm* racial power is 2 squares instead of 1 square.

Razor Shard Swarm

Prerequisite: 21st level, shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Benefit: When you use *shard swarm*, each enemy in the burst takes damage equal to your Intelligence modifier, your Wisdom modifier, or your Charisma modifier.

Telepathic Bulwark

Prerequisite: 21st level, shardmind, telepathy racial trait

Benefit: Each ally within your telepathy range gains resist 5 psychic.

Gatekeeper

Though the Living Gate from which you descend is destroyed, you retain a knack for guarding thresholds.

Prerequisite: Shardmind

The Living Gate, the first best defense against the horror of the Far Realm, is gone, dissolved into thousands of disparate crystal shards. A disaster, certainly, but you are keenly aware of the upside; some of those shards make up your body and some quanta of the original animating consciousness of the Living Gate makes up your mind.

Aside from the obvious benefit of your own existence, it should also be clear that you are composed of the physical manifestation of a straightforward concept, which fundamentally is about controlling access through a threshold.

Whether others call a feature a gate, a door, or an entry doesn't matter; all that matters is that you can conceive of a particular area as a threshold. Once you've got that fixed in your mind, your body viscerally responds, granting you ever greater abilities to open or close a way, to monitor a passage, to ward off foes, and to keep your allies safe.

Gatekeeper Path Features

Dangerous Threshold (11th level): Whenever an enemy leaves a square adjacent to you and enters a square that is not adjacent to you, that enemy grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Gatekeeper's Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to gain an extra action, until the end of your next turn enemies treat the squares adjacent to you as difficult terrain.

Gate Ward (16th level): When you are first bloodied in an encounter, you regain the use of your *chosen threshold* utility power. Additionally, any enemy within or adjacent to the wall created by your *chosen threshold* power grants combat advantage.

Gatekeeper Powers

You Shall Not Pass — Gatekeeper Attack 11

An enemy trying to pass by you or an ally suddenly lights up in an agony of psionic backlash.

Encounter ✦ Psionic, Psychic
Immediate Reaction **Close** burst 10
Trigger: An enemy leaves a square that is adjacent to you or one of your allies
Target: The triggering enemy
Attack: Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma + 6 vs. Fortitude
Level 21: +9.
Hit: 2d12 + Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier psychic damage, and you pull the target 3 squares and it is immobilized (save ends).

Chosen Threshold — Gatekeeper Utility 12

You declare a threshold of your choice off-limits to interlopers, and you can defend it even when drawn far away.

Encounter ✦ Teleportation
Minor Action **Area** wall 4 within 10 squares
Effect: The area of the wall becomes your chosen threshold that lasts until the end of your next turn. Any enemy that enters the area of the wall is immobilized (save ends). Once before the end of your next turn, as a move action you can teleport to any square of the wall, or any square adjacent to the wall, even if you do not have line of sight or line of effect to the square to which you are teleporting.

Gate to Nowhere — Gatekeeper Attack 20

An enemy successfully passes through the area you or your allies guard, but it doesn't end up where it expected; it is gone.

Daily ✦ Psionic, Psychic
Immediate Reaction **Close** burst 10
Trigger: An enemy leaves a square that is adjacent to you or one of your allies
Target: The triggering enemy
Attack: Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma + 6 vs. Fortitude
Level 21: +9.
Hit: 3d12 + Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier psychic damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target is removed from play (save ends). When the target saves against this effect, you can choose to have it return to play in any unoccupied square on the ground within 10 squares of you.

Crystalmind

You are one small part of an entity whose pieces are distributed across all the planes of existence. It's time to take advantage of that essential once-upon-a-time unity.

Prerequisite: Shardmind, *shard swarm* racial power

Your body is an arrangement of inert matter infested with your consciousness. But the spark of your soul is just one part of a much vaster being. Yes, that entity is destroyed and its mind is splintered . . . but if you focus on the shards that make up your form, you can begin to hear the susurrus of a thousand, or perhaps even a thousand thousand other shardmind consciousnesses somewhere "out there."

With a little more concentration, you can tap into this fantastic network of your fellows and use it to hypercharge your own cognition. You can gain a limited ability to predict the immediate future. You can channel the output of all those minds to enhance your attacks. Sometimes you have the ability to borrow the abilities from other shardminds.

When you manage a particularly clear connection, at times you can predict the future so well that you exploit a foe's momentary weakness.

All this extra mind power comes at a price; you can get caught up experiencing shadow glimpses from the lives of countless other shardminds. But occasional fugue states do not concern you; they are the price you must pay as you tap the detritus of a mind that might have once equaled a god's cognition.

Crystalmind Path Features

Psychic Network (11th level): Choose two skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, or Religion. You become trained in those skills.

Shard Swarm Reflex (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you can use your *shard swarm* power as a free action, even if you have already expended it in this encounter.

Psychic Channel (16th level): When you use one of your 1st-level at-will attack powers unaugmented, you can choose to have that power deal psychic damage instead of the normal damage types dealt by that attack.

Crystalmind Powers

Saw It Coming — Crystalmind Attack 11

You know your foe is moving to flank you even before it moves, and it walks right into your waiting attack.

Encounter ✦ Psionic
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: An enemy moves to a square where it flanks you
Effect: You shift 1 square and make a basic attack against the triggering enemy. If the attack hits, it deals 1d10 extra damage and knocks the target prone.

Crystal Duplicate — Crystalmind Utility 12

A fragment of yourself remains behind when you teleport away, providing a convincing simulacra while you move into a new position.

Encounter ✦ Conjuration
Free Action **Close** burst 10
Trigger: You teleport out of a square
Target: The square you just teleported out of in the burst
Effect: You become invisible until you attack or until the end of your next turn. You also conjure a crystal duplicate of yourself on the ground in the target square, and it lasts until the end of your next turn. The crystal duplicate occupies the square, can be attacked, has 1 hit point, and is never damaged by an attack that misses. You move the target up to your speed as part of a minor action and can have the conjuration pick up or manipulate an object as part of a minor action.

Perfect Knowledge — Crystalmind Attack 20

You perceive a momentary weakness in your foe and call out to your allies exactly how to exploit it.

Daily ✦ Psionic, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma + 6 vs. Will
Level 21: +9.
Hit: 3d10 + Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target gains vulnerable 10 to all damage until the end of your next turn.
Miss: Half damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 to all damage until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits includes the new *Forgotten Realms® Campaign Guide*, *Keep on the Shadowfell™*, *Draconomicon™: Chromatic Dragons*, and *Open Grave™: Secrets of the Undead*. Bruce is also an author of *Forgotten Realms* novels, including *Plague of Spells*, first book in the Abolethic Sovereignty series.

The Call of the Feywild: Wayfaring Bards

By Logan Bonner
Illustration by William O'Connor

Now heed my words, for I best know
Of peril telling tales may sow
When small, my mind saw wondrous things
Conjured up through honeyed words
Coupled with the purr of strings

My callow mind misled me then
To search for folk in faerie glen
And O, did I step bright beyond
Mortal peace and places known
Home and friends and young man's bond

My opened eyes saw green so bold
To make my forests pale and cold
My mem'ry dear of flowered field
Died as sweeter savors came
Beauty true I saw revealed

–Opening Stanzas of Sigarune's Tale,
Continued Throughout

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The crumbled libraries and expert scholars scattered around the world carry history's songs and tales into the present, but nothing in the realms of humanity can match the deep traditions of art and lore that endure among the folk of the Feywild. Any bard wise enough to see the value of fey knowledge and brave enough to face the dangers of the Feywild seeks out ways to travel to the plane. By visiting the eladrin cities, carefully seeking out gnome warrens, or confronting the natural dangers of the elves' woods, a wayfarer can hear chronicles never told by any denizen of the natural world.

Reaching the Feywild

While sylvan creatures voices roused
And light fell hazy through the boughs
My eyes grew weighty—full of dream
Weary now, my body lazed
Slumbered nigh to tree and stream

The natural world is rife with cautionary tales of hapless folk who wandered through fey crossings and overambitious iconoclasts who traveled through foolishly, compelled by their wanderlust (such as with "Sigarune's Tale," retold here). A clever bard who can separate out the red herrings can find the approximate locations of fey crossings buried within heaps of legend and local alterations. Failing that, any high concentration of fey monsters in the world hints that a fey crossing might be nearby. After getting close, a bard bent on crossing the planes can use arcane skills (and knowledge of the typical signs that mark fey crossings) to find their exact locations.

To cross over, one must use the Fey Passage ritual (see page 150 of *Manual of the Planes*) or plan to arrive at one of the few times the crossing opens naturally. This schedule might be based on lunar cycles, weather events, or even fey holidays. Consequently, bards visit the Feywild at the same time every year. And they make sure they get back before the crossing closes again, trapping them away from their home plane.

Worldfalls—events that move expanses of land from one plane to another—attract visitors to fey realms. Rather than visiting the Feywild, a bard can wait for a worldfall that brings an eladrin city (for example) into the natural world. Places that frequently fall across planes take on an esoteric character to become exotic bazaars, tourist destinations (for those few tough or privileged enough to travel in relative safety), or meeting places between fey families with members dwelling on both planes. Of course, they're like this only during worldfall, and a wise bard knows how to tell when a city that appears inviting would be dangerous if encountered outside an interval of worldfall.

Socializing with the Fey

On waking ill from arcane spell
I saw my bed was now a cell
In court of elven finery
"Pet!" they cried, and bade me sing
Mortal ballads happily

Prominent eladrin make an ideal audience for balladeers and frequently act as patrons for the arts. Their esteemed artists share fables, poems, and drinks in the dining halls and library towers within the eladrin cities. Becoming part of this inner circle is no easy act, though. Only impressive artistic skill, offbeat presentation, a striking appearance, and no small amount of flattery gains patronage for a newcomer. Wayfaring bards can use their rareness to advantage; an eladrin patron might not resist the novelty of sponsoring a skilled performer from the natural world.

Parties and summits bring fey from many regions (and many races) together. Although some can be an exercise in tedium, most provide a bard with an always-welcome opportunity to impress the crowd and meet new people with other tales to tell. More connections in different societies mean a bard has more places to research stories—or gather allies in times of danger.

The Native Tongue

Any visitor who expects to travel to the Feywild and communicate should know the Elven language. If your character's race doesn't allow you to choose Elven as a language, you can take one of these options (and more are available at a higher level).

- A background related to the Feywild or Elven-speaking creatures
- The Linguist or Mark of Scribing feat
- A *polyglot gem* (*Adventurer's Vault*), a level 6 wondrous item
- The Comprehend Language ritual (if you're desperate)

Why Should an Adventurer Care?

The descriptions of travels to the Feywild in this article might seem like background info, or actions the adventurer takes during downtime at best. So how can you incorporate travels to the Feywild into adventures?

First off, provide some details about your previous travels so your Dungeon Master has the option to use them if your party travels to the Feywild or meets nonplayer characters from there. Second, pepper your roleplaying with details of your time abroad. Toss in an occasional mention of "the time I spent in Tor'uliel's court" or "the bloodthirsty equinox hunt with the Tribe of the Southern Wind, where I made my first kill." Your character might carry trinkets or presents from fey patrons or allies. Third, your time in the Feywild could influence your mechanical choices. Pick powers or backgrounds from this article, multiclass in primal or arcane classes tied to the societies you visited, and take magic items with a fey theme (such as *feystep lacings* from *Adventurer's Vault* or the *fey-blessed circlet* from *Adventurer's Vault 2*).

Lore of the Fey Cultures

On oaken lute shone silver strings
A tool to please the faerie Kings
For Queen most high, for noble elf
Bade this bondman reminisce
Private tunes held dear to self

As summer after summer went
White winter powder branches bent
And autumns blazed in red unmatched
Verse and ode made weak appeal
Cold and mute, my cage stood latched

Creatures and cultures of the Feywild focus their stories and art on different aspects of the past—each race has its own tales to tell. A bard might seek out different groups depending on what sort of legends he or she prefers. Each group detailed below has an entry that lists the types of art forms in which the group specializes.

Eladrin: Blessed with long lives, eladrin scribes and poets use their centuries of life to unearth every obscure detail of the historic events that fascinate them. Their detailed depictions, crafted with both words and visual arts, describe the wars of old. They spent perhaps more care cataloging the political maneuvering and familial connections that bound and reshaped the eladrin houses and cities. Though thorough and meticulously written and rewritten, these accounts can be too dry and rambling for any human to endure. Furthermore, eladrin artists owe tremendous loyalty to their patrons (typically high-ranking members of eladrin houses, and occasionally archfey), causing their odes and chronicles to conform to whatever version of history the patron wishes to present.

Exceptional Arts: Architecture, romantic balladry, historical epic poetry (slightly fictionalized), painting, silverwork

Gnomes: Any chat with a gnome sage can provide the visitor with an interesting story. But that's the *only* guarantee. To the gnomes—including their poets—an exciting tale well told beats a boring truth any day, and tall tales outnumber true accounts by a wide margin within their culture. Though many bards feel the same way, placing artistry above veracity, others feel the need to sift a gnome's story to collect the nuggets of truth hidden within it. Most gnomes know the truth, or have guessed at it. A wayfarer who wants the full truth must learn the gnome's price. Typically, the inquiring party needs to best the gnome in a game of skill (such as a riddle contest or board game) or perform a truly riveting tale of the natural world.

Exceptional Arts: Satire, illusion crafting, debate, improvisational theatre/expository oration

Elves: Though their numbers are smaller than in the natural world, the elves of the Feywild are just as proud. The race's greatest hunters call the Feywild home, as do storytellers whose tales reach back to before any elf left for the natural world. To study with the elves means living a hard life, but it pays off in battle skills and stories of elven heroism. Tribes in the Feywild rarely call one forest home as their counterparts in the natural world do; they must follow a nomadic lifestyle to keep up with the changing landscapes and migrating creatures of their plane.

Exceptional Arts: Storytelling, weaponmaking (especially bows and arrows), woodcarving, leatherworking

Fomorians: A bard possessed of true daring might seek the rarest stories: the ancient records suppressed by the paranoid, possessive fomorian rulers.

These cruel tyrants demand their cyclops scribes take good care to keep libraries current, and each one frequently sends a cyclops digging through the histories for any small bit of guidance that might help with the fomorian's current focus of worry. Any bard trying to access a fomorian library needs stealth and trickery to make it inside the place, but he or she can find rare tales that exist nowhere else. In fact, some of the lost histories of eladrin houses rest within fomorian libraries, which were stolen in ages past. With their keen interest in magic, fomorians also keep stores of rituals and arcane texts. The fomorians have little interest or skill in the arts, but their cyclops servants create beautiful works for their masters.

Exceptional (Cyclops) Arts: Magical crafting, blacksmithing, stonecarving, gemcutting

Satyrs: As far removed from the formal records of the eladrin houses as you can get, satyr songs reveal the scandalous side of life in the Feywild. Full of drunken boasts, bawdy tales, and fey secrets (especially risqué ones), satyrs keep the hidden history the other fey would prefer to bury forever. If a bard has an enemy in the Feywild, chances are a satyr can reveal some skeletons in that enemy's closet.

Exceptional Arts: Drinking songs, bawdy limericks, wine-making, pipe music, dance

Treants: Most treant stories can bore any non-treant to tears. Season-by-season recountings of the growth of specific trees, or an ode to the ninety-three types of rain, don't matter much to an adventurer. However, patience can be rewarding. The treants also know tales—which they share only with those they trust—of the forest primordials in the days before the Dawn War.

Exceptional Arts: Wilderness histories, parables about nature

Firbolgs: Blood and battle fill the sagas told by the firbolg skalds. Arrogant, gory depictions describe spear thrusts, sprays of blood, and cracking bones. Beyond just the bards, each warrior or hunter knows the full tale of at least one Wild Hunt from the past.

Exceptional Arts: Saga oration, weaponmaking, tattooing, ritual dancing

Centaurs: Like firbolgs, centaurs focus on war stories. However, they know more about other cultures since they work closely with them. Centaur family lines strongly influence the tales they remember: A centaur storyteller has a duty to describe the actions of ancient ancestors and to pass on these tales to his or her descendants.

Exceptional Arts: Storytelling, genealogy

Bardic Fellowships

And as my corpse grew gray and frail
My masters ceased my long travail
In faerie hall I'd earned a place
Hated lock now gone, I thrilled
Walking free by fortune's grace

As lorekeepers and artists meet amid eladrin houses or other congregations of fey, they form bonds that become fellowships. These organizations consist of wayfarers and Feywild natives, and they command respect from the fey. This section refers to the Court of Stars described on pages 36–39 of *Manual of the Planes*.

The Badgers: A peculiar federation, the Badgers thrive on secret rituals and bewildering rules. Essentially, they're in the organization to do all the things you do in an organization. As its silly name indicates, the Badgers is practically a parody of other bardic fellowships. Those who appreciate that sort of thing seek out gnomes, reveling in the trials and trickery of their artists.

The Blue Balladeers: It might be difficult for minstrels to visit the followers of the Sea Lords, so they gather at riverbanks and the shores of the brilliant blue sea to share songs and stories.

The Nightingales: This small fellowship follows the Gloaming Fey. They use dusk, stars, and surreal imagery to create their dreamlike songs and poems. The Nightingales also attract followers to the Prince of Hearts. Their odes to unrequited love and smoldering passion are among the few fey creations that make their way into the repertoires of bards in the natural world.

The Reclaimers: Dedicated to restoring the annals of eladrin history, the Reclaimers sneak into fomorian libraries. They especially rely on their fellows, since their work carries so much danger. Reclaimers might provide a distraction so one of their number can sneak into a fomorian stronghold. They're rewarded with part of the haul.

The Sunsingers: Formed within the court of the Summer Fey and spreading to the courts of all its affiliated houses, the Sunsingers create odes to the beauty of clear skies, sun, and the Summer Queen. Due to Tiandra's fondness for mortals, this fellowship is especially easy for wayfaring bards to join. Rumors indicate she might be seeking a skilled mortal to serve as her court minstrel. As is to be expected, the fellowships tied to the different courts within the Court of Stars don't allow overlap. A member of the Sunsingers shouldn't expect any courtesy or troubadour camaraderie from the Voices of Winter.

Voice and Spear: To the fellows of Voice and Spear, heroic sagas mean nothing if you don't create a tale of your own in their mold. Running among the

elves and firbolgs, they're as much hunters as they are poets. Scattered far apart between vast wildernesses, groups of Voice and Spear gather to inspire their tribemates before large hunts.

The Voices of Winter: Writing poetry as bleak as their namesake, the Voices seek to please the Prince of Frost and the other Winter Fey. Some artists consider their works depressing and joyless, but others admire the way their words evoke the biting chill of a winter wind and the listless sensation of enduring winter's long nights.

Builds for Wayfarers

If captors thought this brave reward
Should make my heart accept their lord
My mortal song untrue did ring
Freedom led my path to seek
Mist-enshrouded faerie ring

My spirit clasped in cold embrace
I walked amid a well-known place
My world again became my world
Seeing hearth and hill of old
Scrolls my shaking hands unfurled

Bards who travel to the Feywild do so for varied reasons, and interact with varied groups. Your build and the reasons you cross the planes might influence one another.

Cunning Bard: Many types of fey appreciate trickery and the deft use of words. Eladrin houses could welcome you for your talent, or because you tricked them into becoming patrons years ago. You might know a secret song to bring gnome allies out from their hidden warrens. Your Feywild allies collect stories and rumors about your exploits and look forward to listening to you tell the truth about these events—or perhaps an even more exciting fabrication.

Prescient Bard: Because you follow the traditions of the bow and possess deep wisdom, you find kinship with the elves of the Feywild. Your excursions might take you back to dense treetop canopies where you trained with master elven archers, or bring you back in time for ritualistic seasonal hunts.

Valorous Bard: The fey have less respect for valor than you find in the mortal world. Eladrin and other powerful forces value courage only when it's convenient. They might call on you as a mercenary, relying on your battle prowess and caring less for your poems or songs. Despite this indifference toward valor, the Feywild's history swells with tales of brave heroes; studying the stories of the fey gives you new sources of inspiration.

Wayfaring Bard Backgrounds

From stolen rag, from parchment scrap
Came shards of verse, a poet's map
The finest words, my jailors missed
Secret sagas mourned for home
Phrases born from muse's kiss

'Cross time abroad 'neath foreign stars
This home once white fell gray and marred
No eager public opened their ears
Lonely stones and witless beasts
Heard my song and glimpsed my tears

By choosing one of these backgrounds, you can represent the time your bard spent in the Feywild. Most nonfey choose to speak Elven as their background benefit.

Friend of an Eladrin House: In your wanderings far from the mortal world, you met illustrious members of an eladrin house. They found you charming

and became your patrons. Did they teach you magic and song, or were they impressed by the gifts you already possessed? Do they have other allies in the world? Are you a mere friend, or were you born a member of the house?

Associated Skills: Arcana, Diplomacy
Associated Language: Elven

Trapped in the Feywild: A reluctant traveler, you became imprisoned or lost in the Feywild against your will. While there, you had your first brush with arcane magic and the odd fey creatures that inhabit the realm. Did you wander into the Feywild by mistake and lose your way home? Were you captured and placed in bondage by fomorians or other cruel fey? How did you escape from the Feywild? Do you want to go back and clean up some loose ends, or do you want to avoid the plane for good?

Associated Skills: Arcana, Endurance
Associated Language: Elven

Feats

Though broken echo rasps for you
My aged throat then sang like new
On final verse, my torch alight
Set afire ev'ry scrap
Man once more illumined night

After visiting the Feywild numerous times, you learn to step quickly to the plane in a manner similar to an eladrin using *fey step*.

Heroic Tier Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisite.

Bardic Wayfarer

Prerequisite: Bard, *majestic word* class feature

Benefit: Once per turn when you teleport an ally with a power, you can also teleport 1 square as a free action.

In addition, when you use *majestic word* you can teleport the target 1 square instead of sliding the target.

Envoy to the Fey

Prerequisite: Bard

Benefit: You can speak, read, and write Elven. When you make a Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Streetwise check against a fey creature, you can roll twice and use the higher result.

Paragon Tier Feat

The feat in this section is available to any characters of 11th level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Walk Among the Fey

Prerequisite: 11th level, bard

Benefit: Whenever you use a power that slides a creature, you can teleport that creature an equal number of squares instead. Where you teleport the creature remains subject to any restrictions on the original slide.

Powers

The home once had I never found
For monstrous beast and hate abound
My art now dead, my land now dark
Longing sends these brittle bones
Seeking inspiration's spark

As a master of traveling to the Feywild, you can quickly create portals to that plane. They don't last long, but your spells take advantage of the ability well.

Level 1 Encounter Spell

Victim of the Feywild — **Bard Attack 1**

You send your allies stepping across planes, recreating one of the innumerable tales that describe fey warriors springing from nowhere to attack wanderers in their realm.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Force, Implement, Teleportation
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + Charisma modifier force damage, and you can teleport one or two allies within 5 squares of the target each to different squares adjacent to the target.

Level 2 Utility Spell

Beguiling Ballad — **Bard Utility 2**

Just as your foe thinks victory is assured, you weave a curtain of fey magic that makes it think its enemy was never there.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Teleportation
Immediate Reaction **Close** burst 10
Trigger: An enemy in the burst hits an ally
Target: The triggering enemy
Effect: The target cannot see the triggering ally (save ends). The triggering ally can teleport 5 squares as a free action.

Level 3 Encounter Spell

Unicorn's Charge — Bard Attack 3

Your song describes the nobility and magic of a Feywild unicorn, inspiring your ally to come to the rescue.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Healing, Teleportation
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Effect: One ally within range can charge the target as a free action. If the ally hits, each ally adjacent to the target can regain hit points equal to your Charisma modifier or, as a free action, teleport 1 square.

Level 5 Daily Spell

Timeless Trek in Mithrendain — Bard Attack 5

You tear your foe away from the world and send it on a journey like that of Dourlion, who spent untold days in the timeless Autumn City of the eladrin.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement, Psychic, Teleportation
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage.
Effect: The target is banished to the Feywild (save ends). While banished, it is removed from play. When the effect ends, the target reappears in the space it last occupied or in the nearest unoccupied space of its choice.

Level 6 Utility Spell

Echoing Steps — Bard Utility 6

Your incantation pulls its subject into the Feywild long enough to move freely. Arcane reverberations enable shorter return trips.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Teleportation
Minor Action **Ranged** 10
Target: You or one ally
Effect: The target can teleport 6 squares as a free action. Until the end of the encounter, the target can teleport 1 square as a minor action.

Level 7 Encounter Spell

Drums of the Wild Hunt — Bard Attack 7

You mimic the pounding beat that drives the fury of the Wild Hunt, imparting its savagery to your allies.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Teleportation, Thunder
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: One, two, or three creatures in burst
Attack: Charisma vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d10 + Charisma modifier thunder damage. You can teleport an ally within 10 squares of you to a square adjacent to the target. If you do, that ally gains a +3 power bonus to its next attack roll against the target before the end of your next turn.

Level 15 Daily Spell

Whispers of the Dream King — Bard Attack 15

Your friend takes on the role of the archfey Dream King as you retell a folktale in which a mortal protected the king and was repaid in kind.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Sleep, Teleportation
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target becomes unconscious (save ends). When the target takes damage, it can make a saving throw against this effect.
Aftereffect: Each ally within 3 squares of the target can teleport to a square adjacent to the target as a free action.
Miss: The target becomes dazed (save ends).
Aftereffect: Each ally within 3 squares of the target can teleport to a square adjacent to the target as a free action.

Level 22 Utility Spell

Queen's Clemency — Bard Utility 22

Your tune calls across the planes, imploring an archfey ally to pardon your ally and provide an escape.

At-Will ✦ Arcane, Teleportation
Minor Action **Melee** 1
Target: One ally
Effect: You teleport the target 1 square.

Other Thematic Powers

These powers appear in other sources, but represent the types of illusion and teleportation magic that typify the bardic wayfarer's spell repertoire.

- ✦ **Level 9:** *Hymn of the daring rescue* (*Player's Handbook 2*)
- ✦ **Level 10:** *Illusory erasure* (*Player's Handbook 2*), *veil* (*Player's Handbook 2*)
- ✦ **Level 16:** *Blink zone* (*Player's Handbook 2*)
- ✦ **Level 17:** *Song of summons* (*Player's Handbook 2*)
- ✦ **Level 19:** *Spring to action* (*Arcane Power*)
- ✦ **Level 22:** *Invisible troupe* (*Player's Handbook 2*), *mirrored entourage* (*Player's Handbook 2*), *song of transition* (*Player's Handbook 2*)
- ✦ **Level 25:** *Vision distortion* (*Player's Handbook 2*)

About the Author

Logan Bonner designed and edited 4th Edition products at Wizards of the Coast until 2009. He now lives in the Seattle area and works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor.

Bazaar of the Bizarre: Ritual Enhancements

By Peter Schaefer
Illustration by McLean Kendree

Rituals are one of the world's keys to great power. Only one who has mastered difficult rituals can cross continents in a moment, spy on rivals from afar, and learn information from supernatural entities. Those invested in the art of ritual casting have created a spread of magic items designed to aid and improve their ritual magic. In the rare contests of ritual skill, using one of these items is analogous to dueling with a poisoned blade—considered unsporting, but appropriate or expected in certain cultures.

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Arcane Key

The *arcane key* is a humble tool for use with a common ritual, but it has grand roots. The wizard Mordenkainen first crafted it to make his wards more accessible to allies he might make later, but he also wanted the wards to be more secure than a simple visible symbol or secret sign. Making his ability to access others' secrets is a hidden bonus. Legend claims the great wizard spread a dozen chests warded with the most powerful Arcane Locks throughout the world, only to be opened by the unique *arcane keys* that he used in their enchantment.

Arcane Key **Level 6**

Using this silver key when performing Arcane Lock allows you to seal the door from afar.

Wondrous Item 1,800 gp

Property: You can use this item as an optional focus for the Arcane Lock ritual. When you do, you can seal or unseal the object sealed by the ritual using the at-will power of this item.

Property: You can use this item as an optional focus for the Knock ritual. When you do, for up to 5 minutes after completing the ritual, you can relock or reseal the object affected by the Knock ritual as though you had never opened it, even to the point of automatically replacing an Arcane Lock at its original strength. Doing so requires a minor action.

Power (At-Will): Minor Action. You deactivate or reactivate an Arcane Lock bound to this item, no matter how far you are from it, even if you are on another plane.

Glass Eye

Some people feel like they must know everything. The elf sorcerer Ydri was one such person, and he felt certain that his servants and allies were scheming with each other. He was not so paranoid that he believed they plotted his ruin—he had confidence in his diplomatic skills—but he wanted to be aware of their plans and hated every secret they kept from him. Long ago he created the *glass eyes* and began placing them all over the world, and with a sorcerer's life span, he might still be looking through the ones he can.

Glass Eye **Level 16**

Conceal this glass replica of a bloodshot eye so you can scry the location later.

Wondrous Item 45,000 gp

Power (At-Will): Minor Action. You prime the *glass eye* and place it somewhere. Until another creature touches the eye or until you end this effect as a free action, you can choose to create your scrying sensor in the *glass eye's* square with the Wizard's Sight ritual even when the *eye* is as far away as 100 squares. You can also scry the *eye's* location using View Location even if the *eye's* location is not a location you have visited before or it is not fixed in place.

Monocle of Comprehension

Indrixus was an efficient soul, and a diplomatic one. He mastered every language so he could better communicate and avoid unnecessary bloodshed, but the need to translate to and for his less linguistic companions grated on him. He demanded his companion wizard learn how to magically comprehend other tongues and create this item so they could more ably achieve their goals in foreign lands. His allies were as gifted at diplomacy as they were inclined to pick up new languages, so Indrixus's success left many of his negotiations in smoldering ruins. Today, Indrixus is on his own in the City of Brass, where he acts as an independent negotiator of trade agreements and treaties with a lofty reputation.

Monocle of Comprehension **Level 5**

Sharing this monocle with your friends helps them understand the efreets with whom you're dealing. You didn't tell them that wearing it was unnecessary.

Wondrous Item 1,000 gp

Property: You can use this item as an optional focus for the Comprehend Language ritual. When you do, it splits into up to 8 duplicate monocles for the duration of the ritual. Any creature holding one of the monocles gains the same comprehension granted you by the ritual until it is no longer holding the monocle or the ritual's duration expires.

Phantom Bridle

Sick of mounts falling from beneath her in battle, sword maiden Shelai submitted to studying at the feet of the sages until she had mastered the ritual that would conjure for her a steed crafted of purest magic. Her surprise at its fragility was total. In a fit of fury-inspired genius, she crafted a magic bridle for the magic steed to protect it from harm. A battle with a storm giant has since proven her steed remains too brittle. Shelai is selling the *phantom bridle* and promises great rewards for anyone who can deliver her the perfect mount.

Phantom Bridle Level 10

Placing this bridle on your phantom steed makes it nearly impervious to damage.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Property: After performing the Phantom Steed ritual, you can place this bridle on one of the steeds created. That phantom steed gains resist 20 to all damage until the ritual ends or you remove the bridle.

Portal Rod

Genasi artificer Alkahm of Mirrorsky, which is a small trading outpost in the Elemental Chaos, developed the *portal rod* as a means of evacuating the outpost's inhabitants efficiently. It continues to keep them a half step ahead of the storm archons who inexplicably pursue them.

Portal Rod Level 10

By holding this rune-carved rod on both sides of the portal, you stabilize the link between the two places.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Power (Daily): Minor Action. Until the end of your next turn, one adjacent portal opened with the Linked Portal, Planar Portal, Reverse Portal, or True Portal ritual remains open, even if it would normally close before then. *Sustain Minor:* The effect persists until the end of your next turn. After 10 rounds of sustaining this effect, you can no longer sustain it and the portal closes. The portal begins to waver after 5 rounds, warning you of its impending closure.

Sending Fork

A little magical talent can sometimes be worse than none. This is what the halfling Oleander found when he stumbled into ritual casting: He could access a spread of useful powers, but his ignorance of the arcane prevented him from using them to their fullest. So he used the talents he had—that of making friends and allies—and had a wizard research the *sending fork* to make up some of the difference.

Sending Fork Level 6

Speaking your voice into this tuning fork casts it farther across the world when used with magic.

Wondrous Item 1,800 gp

Property: You can use this item as an optional focus for the Sending ritual. When you do, multiply the maximum range of the ritual by 10.

Power (At-Will): Minor Action. Choose an unoccupied square within 10 squares of you and speak a short phrase (no more than twenty-five words) into the fork. Creatures can hear you as though you are in the chosen square. You do not need line of sight or line of effect to the square.

Shielding Focus

Erigar discovered the *shielding focus* on the corpse of a swordmage who had preceded her into the Unyielding Temple-Maze of Vecna. Exploring a magical labyrinth with thousands of miles of ground to tread and untold numbers of monsters takes time, and resting there requires security. Finding the *shielding focus* helped her clear a campsite in the mist-filled tunnels, but it was not help enough.

Shielding Focus Level 10

This small silver shield increases the strength of your protective circles.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Property: You can use this item as an optional focus for the Magic Circle ritual by placing it at the center of the circle when you complete the ritual. While it remains there, a creature of the affected origin passing the boundary takes double the damage the ritual would normally deal, and the circle does not break until the end of that creature's next turn.

Tenser's Circular Shield

Tired of having his loot damaged by the fights necessary to liberate it from its monstrous captors, Tenser created this simple device to improve his famous floating disk. He enjoyed the additional benefit of protecting his rewards from those of his companions less able to restrain themselves from picking through it for choice items. Ironically, his earliest prototype malfunctioned, preventing even Tenser from accessing the disk's contents and prolonging the ritual's duration indefinitely. When Tenser could not deactivate the device, he left the floating disk in a dungeon and forgot about it.

Tenser's Circular Shield — Level 4

This iron miniature of a circular shield protects your goods as they follow along behind you.

Wondrous Item 840 gp

Property: You can use this item as an optional focus for the Tenser's Floating Disk ritual. When you do, a force bubble over the disk prevents creatures other than you from moving anything on the disk without your express mental permission, and objects gain resist 20 to all damage while on the disk.

Unseen Servant's Hand

The first *unseen servant's hand* was crafted by Brannok Thunderforge, a dwarf invoker with a penchant for summoning celestial servants. When taken to task for needlessly calling on the forces of his god, he moved on to arcane servants. His search for the perfect servants has led him to adjust the unseen servant: His conjured aides have drastically extended durations and ranges, and he sends them all over the world on errands. Alas, not all the secrets of these improvements are known.

Unseen Servant's Hand — Level 4

This barely visible glass hand improves your magical, invisible work force.

Wondrous Item 840 gp

Property: You can use this item as a focus for the Unseen Servant ritual in place of the standard focus. When you do, the ritual conjures two unseen servants with each casting, and each servant conjured by the ritual can lift up to 300 pounds.

About the Author

Peter Schaefer is a petty evil. He terrifies small children with lies about their parents. He notes adults' insecurities and mocks them. He laughs at the unclaimed cats and dogs at the SPCA. Just about the only worthwhile thing he does is work as RPG developer on such books as *Adventurer's Vault*™ 2, the *Plane Below*™, and *Player's Handbook*® 3, in addition to numerous *D&D Insider* articles. Still, that doesn't make up for the way he cuts neighbors' lawns too short, keys cars, or plays loud country music while driving slowly through residential neighborhoods at three in the morning.

Class Acts: Artificer

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

Artificers are as much artists as they are technicians. They see through gifted eyes, perceiving loosed magical energies flowing around them, and with practiced skill they pluck the loosed bits of metamagic to form it into useful objects and enhancements, layering eldritch power onto their allies' weapons, armor, and other gear to augment their natural talents. By using the same techniques, artificers can cobble together useful devices by imbuing arcane magic into the bits and pieces they carry with them, sometimes to create simple devices to destroy their enemies, and at other times to create traps and obstacles for their foes. They could also craft useful and obedient servants.

The spells one artificer learns might be similar to those mastered by another, but the differences in technique vary based on culture and heritage. How an artificer learned his or her craft often influences the essential characteristics common to artificers. As a result, the following new feats showcase how cultural knowledge and tradition might modify how an artificer approaches the magical techniques he or she masters. Since these feats are all designed for the heroic tier, any artificer that meets the prerequisites can take these feats.

Astral Elixir

Prerequisite: Deva, artificer, *shielding elixir* power

Benefit: When you use *shielding elixir*, the target gains radiant resistance in addition to the resistance the power normally grants. The radiant resistance is equal to the resistance ordinarily granted by the power and has the same duration.

When making a saving throw, the target can end the *shielding elixir* effect as a free action to add 1d6 to the saving throw result instead of gaining the normal benefit for ending the effect.

Bolstering Admixture

Prerequisite: Warforged, artificer, *curative admixture* power

Benefit: When you use *curative admixture*, the target can make a saving throw to end one ongoing effect that a save can end.

Bow Caster

Prerequisite: Elf, artificer

Benefit: You can use a bow as an implement for your artificer powers and artificer paragon path powers.

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HEROIC TIER FEATS

Feat	Prerequisite	Benefit
Astral Elixir	Deva, artificer, *shielding infusion*	*Shielding infusion* grants resist 5 radiant and target can end to gain 1d6 bonus to saving throw
Bolstering Admixture	Warforged, artificer, *curative admixture*	*Curative admixture* target can make saving throw to end ongoing damage
Bow Caster	Elf, artificer	Use bow as an implement
Charging Admixture	Minotaur, artificer, *curative admixture*	*Curative admixture* target gains +2 damage on charge attacks
Clarifying Infusion	Kalashtar, artificer, Healing Infusion	Healing Infusion target makes saving throw against dazed or dominated
Cunning Artifice	Changeling, *changeling trick*, artificer	Substitute Arcana for Bluff with *changeling trick*; hit enemy with combat advantage to extend combat advantage to all attackers
Draconic Augmentation	Dragonborn, *dragon breath*, artificer, Augment Energy	Ally deals *dragon breath* damage to adjacent enemy after hit with attack benefiting from Augment Energy
Dwarven Rejuvenation	Dwarf, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation	Grant +2 defenses with Arcane Rejuvenation
Echoing Rejuvenation	Goliath, *stone's endurance* artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation	Gain resist when ally gains temporary hit points from Arcane Rejuvenation
Elemental Infusion	Genasi, artificer, Healing Infusion	Healing Infusion grants benefit determined by elemental manifestation
Furious Concoction	Half-orc, artificer, Healing Infusion	Ally ends Healing Infusion to deal 1d8 extra damage on melee attack
Gloaming Infusion	Shadar-kai, *shadow jaunt*, artificer, Healing Infusion	Healing Infusion target can end effect to gain insubstantial
Human Innovation	Human, artificer, Impart Energy	Spend action point and recharge ally's magic item
Inciting Energy	Githzerai, artificer, Augment Energy	Augment Energy also grants +2 initiative
Iron Formula	Githzerai, artificer, *iron mind*, *resistive formula*	*Resistive formula* grants +1 to all defenses while *iron mind* is unexpended
Lucky Draft	Halfling, artificer, Healing Infusion	Ally ends Healing Infusion to force attacker to reroll attack
Nature's Rejuvenation	Wilden, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation	Ally can shift with temporary hit points from Arcane Rejuvenation
Nessian Rejuvenation	Tiefling, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation	Ally deals extra fire damage with Arcane Rejuvenation
Phantasmal Elixir	Gnome, *fade away*, artificer, *shielding elixir*	*Fade away* also triggers when *shielding infusion* target takes damage
Reaping Infusion	Revenant, *dark reaping*, artificer, Healing Infusion	Healing Infusion targets deals 1d6 extra necrotic damage
Redistribute Minions	Eladrin, artificer, *fey step*	Teleport summoned creatures with teleport
Shifter's Energy	Shifter, *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting*, artificer, Augment Energy	Shifter racial power extends to ally with Augment Energy weapon or implement
Spare Infusion	Half-elf, Dilettante, artificer, Healing Infusion	1/day, expend Dilettante power for extra use of Healing Infusion
Toxic Energy	Drow, artificer, Augment Energy	Augment Energy also deals 1d6 extra poison damage
Vanishing Concoction	Eladrin, artificer, Healing Infusion	Teleport summoned creatures with teleport and allies end Healing Infusion effects to teleport

Charging Admixture

Prerequisite: Minotaur, artificer, *curative admixture* power

Benefit: When you use *curative admixture*, the target gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls on charge attacks until the end of your next turn. At 11th level, the bonus improves to +3. At 21st level, the bonus improves to +4.

Clarifying Infusion

Prerequisite: Kalashtar, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: When you use a Healing Infusion power, the target can make a saving throw to end a dazed or dominated condition that a save can end.

Cunning Artifice

Prerequisite: Changeling, *changeling trick* racial power, artificer

Benefit: You can substitute an Arcana check for a Bluff check made as part of using your *changeling trick* racial power.

Also, while using an artificer melee attack power, when you hit an enemy that grants combat advantage to you, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers until the start of your next turn.

Draconic Augmentation

Prerequisite: Dragonborn, *dragon breath* racial power, artificer, Augment Energy class feature

Benefit: When an ally hits with an attack benefiting from your Augment Energy class feature, one enemy adjacent to that ally takes damage equal to your Constitution modifier of a damage type matching the type you chose for your *dragon breath* power.

Dwarven Rejuvenation

Prerequisite: Dwarf, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation class feature

Benefit: When an ally gains temporary hit points from Arcane Rejuvenation, that ally also gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of his or her next turn.

Echoing Rejuvenation

Prerequisite: Goliath, *stone's endurance* racial power, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation class feature

Benefit: When an ally gains temporary hit points from Arcane Rejuvenation, you gain resist 2 to all damage until the end of your next turn.

Elemental Infusion

Prerequisite: Genasi, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: When you use *resistive formula* or *shielding elixir*, the target gains a benefit in addition to the power's normal effects, depending on your elemental manifestation. The benefit lasts until the effect from the *resistive formula* or *shielding elixir* ends.

Causticsoul: The target gains resist 5 acid. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Cindersoul: The target gains resist 5 fire. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Earthsoul: The target gains a +1 bonus to saving throws.

Firesoul: The target gains resist 5 fire. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Plaguesoul: The target gains resist 5 poison. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Stormsoul: The target gains resist 5 lightning. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Voidsoul: The target gains resist 5 psychic. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Watersoul: The target gains a +2 bonus to saving throws against ongoing damage.

Windsoul: The target gains resist 5 cold. At 11th level, the resistance improves to 10. At 21st level, the resistance improves to 15.

Furious Concoction

Prerequisite: Half-orc, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: When an ally hits with a melee attack and is benefiting from your *resistive formula* or *shielding elixir*, the ally can end the effect as a free action to deal 1d8 extra damage instead of gaining the normal benefit for ending the effect.

Gloaming Infusion

Prerequisite: Shadar-kai, *shadow jaunt* racial power, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: If you have not yet used your *shadow jaunt* power during the encounter, an ally benefiting from your *resistive formula* or your *shielding elixir* can end the effect as a free action to gain insubstantial until the start of his or her next turn. This benefit replaces the power's normal effect.

Human Innovation

Prerequisite: Human, artificer, Impart Energy class feature

Benefit: When you spend an action point, you also allow an adjacent ally to regain the use of a magic item's daily power. This counts as a use of Impart Energy for the purpose of determining the number of times per day an item can be recharged.

Inciting Energy

Prerequisite: Githzerai, artificer, Augment Energy class feature

Benefit: A creature wielding an implement or weapon benefiting from Augment Energy gains a +2 power bonus to initiative checks.

Iron Formula

Prerequisite: Githzerai, artificer, *iron mind* racial power, *resistive formula* power

Benefit: If you have not yet expended your *iron mind* power when you use *resistive formula*, the target of that power gains a +1 power bonus to all defenses in place of the +1 power bonus to AC.

Lucky Draft

Prerequisite: Halfling, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: Instead of gaining the normal benefit for ending the effect of your *resistive formula* or *shielding elixir*, an ally benefiting from either of these powers can end the effect as a free action when hit by a melee attack to force the target to reroll the attack roll.

Nature's Rejuvenation

Prerequisite: Wilden, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation class feature

Benefit: When an ally gains temporary hit points from your Arcane Rejuvenation, he or she can also shift 1 square as a free action.

Nessian Rejuvenation

Prerequisite: Tiefling, artificer, Arcane Rejuvenation class feature

Benefit: When an ally gains temporary hit points from your Arcane Rejuvenation class feature, he or she adds extra fire damage equal to your Charisma modifier to damage rolls until the end of his or her next turn.

Phantasmal Elixir

Prerequisite: Gnome, *fade away* racial power, artificer, *shielding elixir* power

Benefit: You can use your *fade away* power when you or an ally affected by your *shielding elixir* power takes damage. If the ally triggered the power, both you and the ally become invisible until you attack or until the end of your next turn.

Reaping Infusion

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping* racial power, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: When you use your *dark reaping* racial power, one ally benefiting from your *resistive formula* or *shielding elixir* deals 1d6 extra necrotic damage on its next attack before the end of your next turn.

Redistribute Minions

Prerequisite: Eladrin, artificer, *fey step* racial power

Benefit: Whenever you use *fey step* to teleport, you can teleport each creature summoned by your artificer summoning powers an equal number of squares.

Shifter's Energy

Prerequisite: Shifter, *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting* racial power, artificer, Augment Energy class feature

Benefit: When you use your shifter racial power, the power's benefits extend to one ally wielding a weapon or implement affected by your Augment Energy. The effect ends when the ally uses the +2 bonus to the attack roll.

Spare Infusion

Prerequisite: Half-elf, Dilettante racial trait, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: Once per day, you can expend your half-elf Dilettante power as a free action to use a Healing Infusion power one extra time during the encounter.

Toxic Energy

Prerequisite: Drow, artificer, Augment Energy class feature

Benefit: When an ally hits with an attack benefiting from the bonus granted by your Augment Energy class feature, the attack deals 1d6 extra poison damage. At 11th level, the extra damage increases to 2d6. At 21st level, the extra damage increases to 3d6.

Vanishing Concoction

Prerequisite: Eladrin, artificer, Healing Infusion class feature

Benefit: Instead of gaining the normal benefit for ending the effect of your *resistive formula* or *shielding elixir*, an ally can end the effect as a free action to teleport a number of squares equal to 2 + your Dexterity modifier.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer whose work can be found in numerous roleplaying sourcebooks and accessories. His most recent work can be found in the forthcoming *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting* and *Dark Sun® Creature Catalog*, *Monster Manual 3*, and the *Player's Handbook 3*. Robert lives in Tennessee.

"Be ever vigilant, for the brightest civilization casts the deepest shadows."

–Irion

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Class Acts: Avenger
The Unbroken Circle

By Jeff Morgenroth
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

Erathium's golden domes are tarnished. Haggard citadels now glower over the pride of this once splendid city of Nerath. Citizens cast refuse into streets where processions of regal kings once marched. Most care nothing for the shattered glory of their heritage, scorning temples and scrawling petty graffiti across friezes of a better time. The citizens of Erathium live in the specter of their ancestors, their hearts open to corruption—but even amid this urban squalor are those sworn to remember.

They are the Unbroken Circle, an invisible knife against the growing darkness of the world. This unity of avengers is one of dauntless faith and ruthless fervor, selflessly protecting the descendants and lost customs of Nerath. However, they need your help.

History of the Circle

"Study well the folly and victories of our order; such knowledge will guide your hand as surely as the goddess's blessing."
–Irion

Hundreds of years ago, before the Circle's foundation, the city of Erathium was the prosperous jewel of culture and trade in the empire of Nerath. The covenant between the temple of Erathis and the imperial rulers was strong, with just King Pedrawd—kinsman to Elidyr—governing with divine edict. Pedrawd relied on the temple to secure stability within the growing metropolis, and it acted as his swift hand to dispatch threats. These Erathi priests became the first avengers of their faith, penitently hunting down villains threatening the king's peace. Their triumphs numbered many, but these triumphs did not last long, because King Pedrawd used their oaths of enmity toward selfish ends.

Corruption of a Kingdom

Soon these avengers bloodied their swords with the king's rivals—upstart nobles or illegitimate sons claiming lordship. The avengers became a weapon of fear in the king's hand, lethal in craft and guiltless in their faith; civil oppression spread with the roll of decades. Eventually, the Erathi avengers suspected that King Pedrawd's despotism was not his own. An avenger named Irion discovered the malevolence of the Nine Hells festering like a cancer within the king's soul. Marabron, high-priest of Erathis, was unmoved upon

hearing of this from Irion and professed inaction due to oaths of loyalty to the crown. Irion was branded a heretic, yet he saw truth behind the greedy eyes of the priesthood: the prideful dominion of Asmodeus had corrupted Marabron as well, blinding him to Erathis's truth. Irion acted, for faith and duty to his lost King, and assassinated Pedrawd.

Upon Pedrawd's death, strife, terror, and corruption eclipsed Erathium.

A Goddess Is Marred, and the Circle Forms

Irion, with a handful of followers, escaped retribution within the pandemonium of the city. The false clergy of Erathis seized power, led by the once righteous Marabron, who created stability at the cost of absolutism. A shadow-war ravaged the already hemorrhaging city, with Irion's avengers hunting down any under Marabron's influence. Revenge blinded Irion to the damage his actions caused the people of Erathium; it would take Erathis to end the conflict. Her exarch appeared during a clash of the two groups, proclaiming that their feud must cease for peace and lawfulness to return to the city.

Irion begged forgiveness, but Marabron refused. He struck the exarch's outstretched hand, severing it with fiendish rage. The goddess's ire waxed full, and before her exarch perished, she finished what Irion started. The servants of Asmodeus were consumed with astral fire springing from pools of the exarch's blood—except for Marabron. Erathis stripped him of his power and forced him into exile, a shattered wretch doomed to live a thousand lifetimes branded as a traitor and blasphemer.

Faithful Irion was gifted a sacred ring, still shining around the exarch's bloody finger. Graced as he was, Irion took this token as a relic, yet all around him the glory of Nerath toppled. He swore then—upon that divine ring—to uphold the just sanctity of peaceful rule from any that would subvert it and to protect the memory of glorious Nerath until the line of kings is restored. Yet, he could not do it alone.

Within the Circle

"Be resolved and unbending as a guardian lion among wolves that ravage the flock."

–Irion

As a member of the Unbroken Circle, you must operate in secret because Irion's actions are still assumed to have started the dark years of oppression following the empire's collapse. Even the Erathian temple views you as a self-righteous heretic and vigilante. When you appear, death follows, and your "lawlessness" is cursed in the name of the same god you and the Circle serve. People don't realize that you're their most dedicated protector, hunting only those unseen and insidious forces that corrupt others.

Though the Circle is based in decaying Erathium, you might be a member of a cell in another large city. You meet regularly with other Circle members to perform divine rites to Erathis and plan your actions. You might work in small teams of avengers or with your adventuring companions to infiltrate and dispatch corrupting forces.

Chief among your sworn foes are the servants of Asmodeus, as well as deathless Marabron, who forever wanders in vengeful exile. The secretive cult of Vecna is another which, like devils, exploits the moral frailty common in any center of civilization. Newly arrived, and most ominous, are the mysterious star spawn, whose alien motives have yet to be uncovered. Corruption takes mundane form as well, with cruel nobles and racketeers often provoking your blade.

As a Circle agent, you revere most the relic of the goddess's ring—still resting on the exarch's severed though unblemished hand. Second only to the ring is the *Words of Irion*, a manuscript penned by Irion that details the Unbroken Circle's history, creed, and techniques.

Entering the Circle

"Seek neither renown nor reward, for such is the province of they that crawl from the Fire, or are doomed to reside there."

–Irion

The reputation of the Unbroken Circle as a band of heretics and assassins makes them risky and difficult to pursue. Even if you discover one of their cells, the agents view you with a suspicion coming from their long years of eliminating hidden evil.

If you are a skilled avenger entering a city, the Circle might be watching you already. If you are a promising candidate, they might secretly manipulate you into situations that test your faith and dedication to their creed. If you show that you can make difficult decisions and end corruption, they grant you the offer of fellowship.

Although nearly all inductees worship Erathis, the Circle accepts help from any avenger who is committed to the group's goals. Some Circle agents are not recruited, but made, since leadership of the Unbroken Circle actively grooms hopefuls to don the vestments of their avengers.

You can take the following background when creating your avenger.

Protégé of the Circle: A citizen of a large city, you were secretly selected by avengers of the Unbroken Circle to join their ranks. From a young age you were steeped in ancient history and practiced the avenger's deadly skills. Which of your traits attracted the Circle's attention? Was it your faith in Erathis or dedication to the customs of Nerath? Did you resist a perilous corruption, demonstrating an innate resiliency to the enemies of the Circle?

Associated Skills: History, Insight

Agent of the Unbroken Circle

"I am the knife that bleeds this city of its corruption."

Prerequisite: Avenger, *oath of enmity* power

Walking unseen among a thankless populace are agents of the Unbroken Circle—a unity of avengers in service to the goddess Erathis. Each agent is sworn to root out and destroy forces that foul the goodness of mortal hearts. They wage a constant war against growing evil, defending civilization and the honor of Nerath from the closing jaws of tyranny and corruption.

As an agent of the Unbroken Circle, you take on corruption wherever you find it—and since you actively look for it, you find a great deal of it. Whether you're based in a population center and spend most of your time there or travel far afield in search of those who have fallen morally and ethically, you rely on your skills as an avenger and the ones you gain as an agent to handle combat situations and provide support to those with whom you travel. Due to your constant vigilance for signs of corruption, you have found few you can trust, and you always formulate an escape plan in every situation, just in case the ones you rely upon fail you.

Agent of the Unbroken Circle Path Features

Incorruptible (11th level): You become trained in the Insight and Streetwise skills.

Unity Unbroken (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, until the end of your next turn your allies gain a +5 bonus to damage rolls against your *oath of enmity* target while they are flanking that target.

Exorcise Corruption (16th level): Whenever you score a critical hit against your *oath of enmity* target, each ally within 10 squares of your target that can see the target can make a saving throw, with a bonus to the saving throw equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Agent of the Unbroken Circle Prayers

Carve Out Corruption — Agent of the Unbroken Circle — Attack 11

You strike to the malignant core of your sworn enemy, momentarily stopping its corrupting influence.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Radiant, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Wisdom modifier radiant damage, and the target takes a -5 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that target Will until the end of your next turn.

Sanctity of the Ring — Agent of the Unbroken Circle — Utility 12

A radiant halo encircles you and nearby allies, blessing them with your divine unity.

Daily ✦ Divine, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You enter the sanctity of the ring stance. Until the stance ends, you and your allies gain a +2 bonus to saving throws while adjacent to your *oath of enmity* target. If you and at least 2 other allies are adjacent to your *oath of enmity* target, the bonus increases to +4.

Judgment of the True King — Agent of the Unbroken Circle — Attack 20

You advance in concert with your allies, taking strength from their bravery and beseeching the freed spirit of King Pedrawd to imbue your weapon with its divine wrath.

Daily ✦ Divine, Radiant, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Effect: Before the attack, you and each ally within 5 squares of you can shift 3 squares as a free action.
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 4[W] + Wisdom modifier radiant damage, or 6[W] + Wisdom modifier radiant damage if at least two of your allies are adjacent to the target.
Miss: Half damage.

About the Author

Lurking in the outskirts of Seattle, **Jeff Morgenroth** has mastered fires of endless academia and the soulless drudgery of the skittering rat-race, at last making his pact with the baleful entities at Wizards of the Coast. He edited a portion of *Monster Manual*™ 2, and it is prophesied that his name will defile the pages of more books soon.

Class Acts: Invoker

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

The covenants invokers enter into with their gods define the relationship they enjoy, the means by which they apprehend the divine, and the methods by which they annihilate their enemies. Yet the three covenants described in the *Player's Handbook 2* and *Divine Power* are not the only ways invokers individuate themselves. Invokers can devote further study into the methods and ideals upheld by their gods to expand their options when they channel divine energy, just as invokers can distinguish themselves through the prayers they master. Furthermore, racial talents and customs can also influence how the invoker advances his or her god's aims in the world and beyond it.

The "Invoker Essentials" article goes into extensive detail about the invoker class, its place in the world, and new avenues for character development. In addition to the options discussed there, this short article makes available further choices for customization with a selection of new heroic tier, paragon tier, and epic tier feats. Using both articles together, you are certain to have all the mechanical support you need to create a distinctive and compelling invoker.

Heroic Tier Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

Angelic Harrier

Prerequisite: Invoker

Benefit: When you hit only one target with an invoker ranged encounter attack or an invoker ranged daily attack, you can slide the target 1 square after the power's effect is resolved.

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Bitter Rebuke

Prerequisite: Invoker, Divine Covenant class feature, *rebuke undead* power

Benefit: Modify *rebuke undead* based on your Divine Covenant.

Covenant of Malediction: When you hit a creature with *rebuke undead*, it takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Covenant of Preservation: When you hit a creature with *rebuke undead*, it is slowed until the end of your next turn.

Covenant of Wrath: When you hit a creature with *rebuke undead*, you can push it a number of squares up to 2 + your Constitution modifier instead of only 2 squares.

Breath of the Gods

Prerequisite: Dragonborn, invoker, Divine Covenant class feature

Benefit: Your *dragon breath* counts as a divine encounter attack power for the purpose of your covenant manifestation.

In addition, you gain a +2 feat bonus to Diplomacy checks.

Carceri's Manacles

Prerequisite: Invoker

Benefit: Any enemy that ends its turn adjacent to a creature you have summoned is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Crushing Doom

Prerequisite: Invoker, *maledictor's doom* power

Benefit: When you target an enemy with *maledictor's doom*, the enemy takes a penalty to damage rolls equal to your Wisdom modifier until the end of your next turn.

HEROIC TIER FEATS

Feat	Prerequisite	Benefit
Angelic Harrier	Invoker	Slide ranged attack target 1 square
Bitter Rebuke	Invoker, Divine Covenant class feature,	Divine Covenant augments *rebuke undead* *rebuke undead*
Breath of the Gods	Dragonborn, invoker, Divine Covenant	*Dragon breath* triggers covenant manifestation, +2 Diplomacy
Carceri's Manacles	Invoker	Enemies adjacent to summoned creatures are slowed
Crushing Doom	Invoker, *maledictor's doom*	*Maledictor's doom* applies penalty to damage rolls
Dark Invitation	Revenant, invoker, *dark reaping*	*Dark reaping* pulls target
Dubious Manifestation	Drow, *cloud of darkness*, invoker, Divine Covenant	Grant ally concealment with covenant manifestation
Enduring Fury	Half-orc, Half-Orc Resilience, invoker	Combat advantage with close invoker attacks when first bloodied
Flexible Covenant	Changeling, invoker, Divine Covenant	Swap covenant manifestation after extended rest
Hand of Fury	Invoker, *hand of radiance*	Use *hand of radiance* as minor action with missed daily prayer
Heaven's Arrow	Invoker	+2 attacks with ranged powers against isolated targets
Longtooth Doom	Longtooth shifter, *longtooth shifting*, invoker, Covenant of Malediction	+2 damage with invoker attacks after *longtooth shifting*
Mobile Covenant	Razorclaw shifter, *razorclaw shifting*, invoker	Shift with encounter or daily attack
Nature's Doom	Wilden, invoker, Covenant of Malediction	Modify wilden racial powers
Preserving Shadows	Shadar-kai, invoker, *preserver's rebuke*	Make ally hit before *preserver's rebuke* insubstantial
Preserver's Summons	Invoker, *preserver's rebuke* power	Slide ally and end mark with *preserver's rebuke*
Relentless Crusade	Warforged, invoker, *warforged resolve*	+1 on next attack after using *warforged resolve* racial power
Righteous Summons	Invoker, Divine Covenant	Summoned creature gains benefit determined by Divine Covenant
Unsettling Omen	Invoker	Combat advantage against adjacent targets with close blast attacks
Vanguard's Eye	Invoker	Grant +2 defenses against opportunity attacks to allies adjacent to your ranged attack target
Wild Wrath	Elf, invoker, *elven accuracy*, Covenant of Wrath	Deal extra damage with covenant manifestation and *elven accuracy*

Dark Invitation

Prerequisite: Revenant, invoker, *dark reaping* power

Benefit: Once per turn when you apply damage from *dark reaping* to a creature, you can pull that creature a number of squares up to the higher of your Constitution or Intelligence modifiers.

Dubious Manifestation

Prerequisite: Drow, *cloud of darkness* racial power, invoker, Divine Covenant class feature

Benefit: When you trigger your covenant manifestation while you are within the area of your *cloud of darkness*, one ally within 10 squares of you gains concealment until the end of your next turn.

Enduring Fury

Prerequisite: Half-orc, Half-Orc Resilience racial trait, invoker

Benefit: The first time you are bloodied in an encounter, you gain combat advantage with invoker close burst or close blast attack powers until the end of your next turn.

Flexible Covenant

Prerequisite: Changeling, invoker, Divine Covenant class feature

Benefit: After each extended rest, replace your covenant manifestation with the covenant manifestation from any Divine Covenant of your choice. You gain this covenant manifestation until the end of your next extended rest.

Hand of Fury

Prerequisite: Invoker, *hand of radiance* power

Benefit: When you miss all targets with a daily invoker power, you can use *hand of radiance* as a minor action once before the end of your turn.

Heaven's Arrow

Prerequisite: Invoker

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to attack rolls with ranged invoker attack powers against targets that are not adjacent to any creature. Increase this bonus to +3 at 15th level and +4 at 25th level.

Longtooth Doom

Prerequisite: Longtooth shifter, *longtooth shifting* racial power, invoker, Covenant of Malediction class feature

Benefit: When you use *longtooth shifting*, you gain a +2 bonus to damage rolls with invoker attack powers until the end of your next turn.

Mobile Covenant

Prerequisite: Razorclaw shifter, *razorclaw shifting* racial power, invoker

Benefit: When you use *razorclaw shifting*, until the end of the encounter when you hit with an encounter or daily invoker attack power, you can shift a number of squares equal to your Wisdom modifier instead benefiting from your covenant manifestation.

Nature's Doom

Prerequisite: Wilden, invoker, Covenant of Malediction class feature

Benefit: You gain the following benefits with your wilden racial powers.

Voyage of the Ancients: The triggering enemy takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws until the start of your next turn.

Wrath of the Destroyer: You can substitute a ranged basic attack for the melee basic attack or charge attack granted by this power.

Pursuit of the Hunter: The extra damage you deal from this power is radiant. This power also gains the radiant keyword.

Preserving Shadows

Prerequisite: Shadar-kai, invoker, *preserver's rebuke* power

Benefit: When you use *preserver's rebuke*, the triggering ally becomes insubstantial until the start of your next turn.

Preserver's Summons

Prerequisite: Invoker, *preserver's rebuke* power

Benefit: When you use *preserver's rebuke*, you can slide the triggering ally 1 square and, if it is marked, you can end that condition.

Relentless Crusade

Prerequisite: Warforged, *warforged resolve* racial power, invoker

Benefit: Whenever you use *warforged resolve*, you gain a +1 bonus to the next attack roll you make before the end of your next turn.

Righteous Summons

Prerequisite: Invoker, Divine Covenant class feature

Benefit: Creatures created by your divine summoning powers gain a benefit based on your Divine Covenant.

Covenant of Malediction: Enemies take a -1 penalty to attack rolls while adjacent to your summoned creature.

Covenant of Preservation: Any ally that starts its turn adjacent to your summoned creature can shift 1 square as a minor action until the end of its turn.

Covenant of Wrath: Your summoned creatures gain a feat bonus to damage rolls equal to your Constitution modifier.

Unsettling Omen

Prerequisite: Invoker

Benefit: You gain combat advantage for close blast invoker powers against adjacent enemies.

Vanguard's Eye

Prerequisite: Invoker

Benefit: When you hit a target using a ranged invoker attack, each ally adjacent to the target gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against opportunity attacks until the start of your next turn.

Wild Wrath

Prerequisite: Elf, *elven accuracy* power, invoker, Covenant of Wrath class feature

Benefit: When you use *elven accuracy* to reroll an encounter or daily invoker attack power, any target you hit with the reroll takes 4 extra damage.

PARAGON TIER FEATS

Feat	Prerequisite	Benefit
Accursed Isolation	11th level, invoker, *maledictor's doom*	Increase *maledictor's doom* penalty against one target
Pillar of Heaven	11th level, invoker	Gain bonus to defenses with missed encounter attack
Preserver's Fury	11th level, *preserver's rebuke*	Enemy hit by attack benefiting from *preserver's rebuke* gains vulnerability to all damage
Staff of Channeled Invocations	11th level, invoker	Use staff to make ranged attacks as melee attacks
Wrathful Outburst	11th level, invoker, *armor of wrath*	Target additional enemy with *armor of wrath*
Wrathful Panoply	11th level, invoker, *armor of wrath*	+1 all defenses with *armor of wrath*

Paragon Tier Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Accursed Isolation

Prerequisite: 11th level, invoker, *maledictor's doom* power

Benefit: If you target only one creature with *maledictor's doom*, the penalty to attack rolls increases to -3, and it is a -5 penalty to opportunity attack rolls.

Pillar of Heaven

Prerequisite: 11th level, invoker

Benefit: When you miss each target with an invoker encounter attack power while using a staff, you gain a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of your next turn.

Preserver's Fury

Prerequisite: 11th level, *preserver's rebuke* power

Benefit: When you use *preserver's rebuke* and your next attack roll against the triggering enemy hits, that enemy gains vulnerability to all damage equal to your Intelligence modifier until the end of your next turn.

Staff of Channeled Invocations

Prerequisite: 11th level, invoker

Benefit: When you use any ranged invoker attack power through a staff, you can use the power as a melee attack with a range of 1.

Wrathful Outburst

Prerequisite: 11th level, invoker, *armor of wrath* power

Benefit: When you use *armor of wrath*, you can target any one additional enemy in the burst.

Wrathful Panoply

Prerequisite: 11th level, invoker, *armor of wrath* power

Benefit: When you use *armor of wrath*, you gain a +1 bonus to all defenses until the end of your next turn. At 21st level, the bonus increases to +2.

Epic Tier Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of 21st level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Binding Wrath

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker, *armor of wrath* power

Benefit: When you use *armor of wrath*, you can immobilize the target until the end of your next turn instead of dealing damage to it.

Cascading Doom

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker, *maledictor's doom* power

Benefit: Each enemy affected by your *maledictor's doom* power gains vulnerability to all damage equal to the number of targets affected by the power until the start of your next turn.

Dreadful Invocation

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker, trained in Intimidate

Benefit: Whenever you score a critical hit with an invoker encounter or daily attack power, that enemy moves its speed away from you by the safest means available and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends). Creatures immune to fear do not move and do not take this penalty.

EPIC TIER FEATS

Feat	Prerequisite	Benefit
Binding Wrath	21st level, invoker, *armor of wrath*	Immobilize with *armor of wrath* in place of damage
Cascading Doom	21st level, invoker, *maledictor's doom*	*Maledictor's doom* target gains vulnerability to all damage
Dreadful Invocation	21st level, invoker, trained in Intimidate	Critical causes enemy to run away
Inexorable Tide	21st level, invoker, *maledictor's doom*	Push *maledictor's doom* target when it takes any damage
Invoker Implement Expertise	21st level, invoker	Score critical hit on 19 or 20
Preserver's Command	21st level, invoker, *preserver's rebuke*	Grant basic attack with *preserver's rebuke*
Reaching Invocation	21st level, invoker	Target additional enemy adjacent to close burst or blast

Inexorable Tide

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker, *maledictor's doom* power

Benefit: Whenever a target subject to a penalty to attack rolls from your *maledictor's doom* power takes damage from any attack, you can push the target 1 square as a free action.

Invoker Implement Expertise

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker

Benefit: When you wield an invoker implement while using a divine power, you can score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Preserver's Command

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker, *preserver's rebuke* power

Benefit: When you use *preserver's rebuke*, you can forgo the bonus to your next attack roll to instead allow the ally hit by the triggering enemy to make a basic attack.

Reaching Invocation

Prerequisite: 21st level, invoker

Benefit: When you use a close burst or blast invoker power, you can target one additional enemy adjacent to the close burst or blast.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred role-playing game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire Roleplaying Game*, *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, and the d20 System. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast is in *Player's Handbook® 3*, *Martial Power™ 2*, and *Draconomicon™ 2: Metallic Dragons*, and in the pages of *Dragon™* and *Dungeon™* magazines. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Class Acts: Ranger
Scions of Onat

By Jared Glenn
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

"This land is sacred to the primal spirits, and though metal and stone now stand where tree and field once did, those spirits remain. They stand by us, as echoes of our own souls. Together we guard Onat."

–Weltec Fjeron,
High Mediator of the Scions of Onat

Those travelers who see the city of Onat from a distance find it hard to differentiate it from other points of light in the world. However, travelers who approach the gate feel an inhuman gaze settle on their weary backs, and many of them describe this feeling as that which makes Onat so unusual.

In the ancient past, primal spirits permeated the region that now holds Onat, and a tribe of people contentedly lived in harmony with them. Over time, the site grew to a village, and the village grew to a town; the spirits changed, and so did the town's people. Although most of the old religion has fallen by the wayside, the oldest and noblest families of Onat have maintained tradition by founding an order known as the Scions of Onat. This elite guard stands sentinel over Onat vigilantly, but a single member never watches alone. In fact, each Scion of Onat is not one, but two watchers—a beast companion also stands guard with each Scion.

Entry into this order must occur before a youth reaches adulthood. The noble blood of Onat are given this opportunity, but any youth who stands guard over the community for five years can also take tests. In the final rite of passage, this youth is placed in a room with a powerful beast. If he or she can gain its respect before being torn to shreds, a lifelong bond forms between the pair, tying each to the fate of the other.

Once the initial bond forms, the two participate in a ritual that calls upon the primal spirits of Onat to strengthen the bond. Some claim that a primal spirit remains within each of the participants of the ritual, but this claim has not been verified. However, those visitors to the urban jungle admit to seeing a spark of intelligence in the eyes of Onat's bestial guardians—possibly an aftereffect of powerful and secret magic. If a traveler gains the trust of the people of

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Onat, though, he or she hears the claim that the Scion of Onat and his or her beast are not two creatures at all, but a single soul born to two bodies. The rite and ritual reconnects the soul with the help of a primal spirit, causing the two, which were once separated, to merge back into one whole. The communication between the two borders on telepathy, to the point that the ranger might as well be in two places at once.

These rangers and their companions become protectors of the twisting streets and vaulted rooftops of the ancient site. Fearless of the shadows and protected by the light, each protector watches the community with not one, but two, pairs of eyes.

Ranger Feats

The following feats emphasize the connection between rangers and their companions, and grant additional mastery and teamwork.

Heroic Tier Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisite.

Critical Teamwork

Prerequisite: Ranger, Beast Mastery class feature

Benefit: When your beast companion scores a critical hit, it deals extra damage equal to 1d6 per plus of the weapon you are wielding.

Flanking Beast Master

Prerequisite: Scion of Onat feat

Benefit: While you are flanking a creature with your beast companion, you and your beast companion gain a +3 bonus from combat advantage against that creature instead of the normal +2 bonus.

Knowing Eyes

Prerequisite: Scion of Onat feat

Benefit: Whenever you are adjacent to your beast companion and make an Insight check, you can roll twice and keep the better result.

Scion of Onat

Prerequisite: Ranger, Beast Mastery class feature

Benefit: You gain training in Streetwise.

In addition, whenever you spend a healing surge while your beast companion is adjacent to you, it regains hit points equal to one-half your healing surge value, in addition to the normal benefit of spending a healing surge.

Terrifying Duo

Prerequisite: Scion of Onat feat

Benefit: While you are adjacent to your beast companion, you gain a +5 feat bonus to Intimidate checks.

Ranger Powers

The powers below present new options for making your ranger and beast companion into a fierce and seamless team.

Level 1 Encounter Exploit

Ferocious Insight — **Ranger Attack 1**

Your companion exudes an air of ferocity as it attacks, which lends agility and allows you both to react to your foe's movements.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial
Standard Action **Melee** beast 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. AC
Hit: 2[B] + your beast's Strength modifier damage. If you and your beast companion are flanking the target, the first time the target moves or shifts before the end of your next turn, you and your beast companion can shift 3 squares as an immediate reaction.

Level 1 Daily Exploit

Seismic Strike — **Ranger Attack 1**

You strike at your foe and your companion aids you in keeping the fools who oppose you within arm's reach.

Daily ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you can give your beast companion the following command:
Minor Action (1/turn) **Melee** beast 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. AC
Hit: The target falls prone.

Level 5 Daily Exploit

Beastly Protector Ranger Attack 5

Your situation looks bleak, but your companion comes quickly to your rescue.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial
Standard Action **Melee** beast 1
Requirement: You must be bloodied.
Target: One or two creatures
Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. AC
Hit: 2[B] + beast's Strength modifier damage, and you gain 10 temporary hit points.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, each time an enemy adjacent to your beast companion makes a melee attack against you, your beast companion deals damage equal to its Strength modifier to the attacker as a free action.

Level 9 Daily Exploit

Shepherding Slice Ranger Attack 9

In a flurry of movement, you send your enemies careening toward your beast companion, which is unlikely to let them escape.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Effect: You shift 4 squares.
Target: One, two, or three creatures adjacent to you at any point during the shift
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Strength modifier damage, and slide the target 5 squares to a square adjacent to your beast companion. If you targeted only one creature with this power, it deals 1[W] extra damage.
Miss: Half damage, and slide the target 3 squares to a square adjacent to your beast companion.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you can command your beast companion to make an opportunity attack as an opportunity action instead of an immediate interrupt.
In addition, you can give your beast companion the following command until the end of the encounter:
Minor Action (1/turn) **Melee** beast 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. AC
Hit: Slide the target 1 square.

Level 15 Daily Exploit

Aligned Strike Ranger Attack 15

You and your companion coordinate your strikes to land on two different foes.

Daily ✦ Beast, Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Primary Target: One creature
Primary Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Make a secondary attack.
Melee beast 1
Secondary Target: One creature other than the primary target
Secondary Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. AC
Hit: 3[B] + beast's Strength modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Level 17 Encounter Exploit

Lights Out Ranger Attack 17

In a sudden move, you and your companion attack the eyes of your foes, making them easy prey.

Encounter ✦ Beast, Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Primary Target: One creature
Primary Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target is blinded until the end of your next turn.
Effect: Make a secondary attack.
Melee beast 1
Secondary Target: One creature other than the primary target
Secondary Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. AC
Hit: 1[B] + beast's Strength modifier damage, and the target is blinded until the end of your next turn.

Level 25 Daily Exploit

Fearsome Roar Ranger Attack 25

Your beast companion bursts into thunderous roars of anger, shocking your foes and preventing their escape.

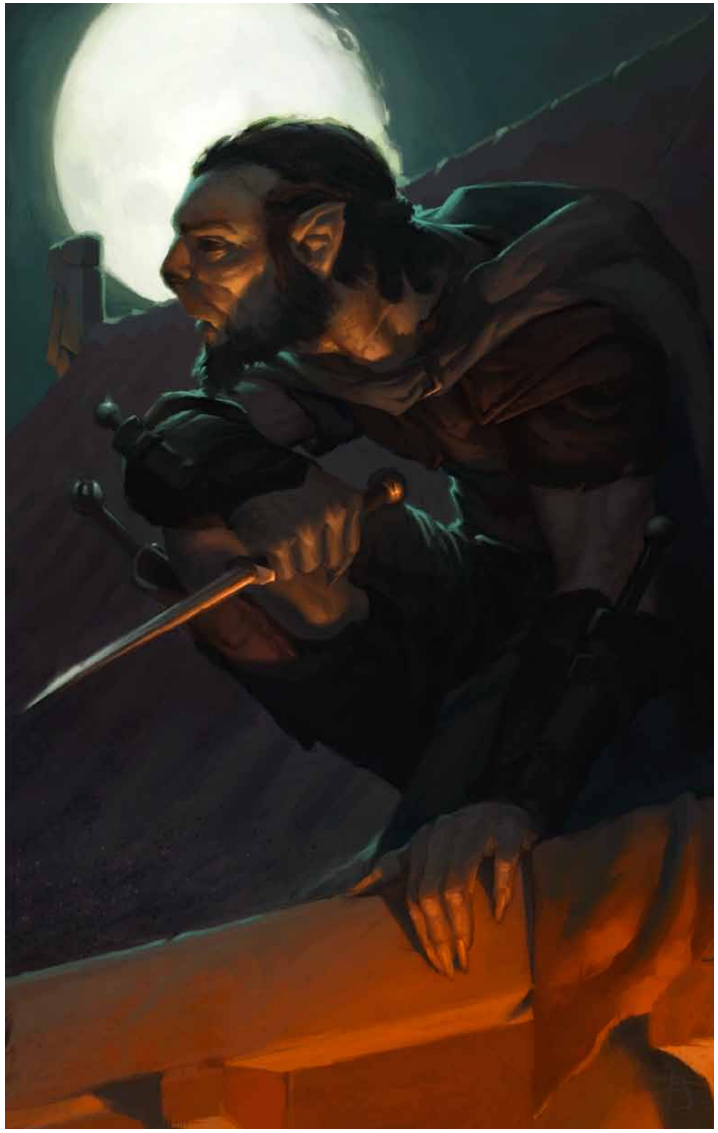
Daily ✦ Beast, Martial
Standard Action **Close** burst 3 (beast)
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. Will
Hit: 3[B] + beast's Strength modifier damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you can give your beast companion the following command:
Standard Action **Close** blast 3
Target: Each enemy in blast
Attack: Beast's attack bonus vs. Will
Hit: 1[B] + beast's Strength modifier damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Jared Glenn is a connoisseur of Dungeons & Dragons® in general, and 4th Edition in particular. A determined freelance writer, he has written and published two classes, The Explorer and The Jester, with Alluria Publishing. He also manages and produces a weekly D&D podcast, The Power Source, on the d20 Radio Network. Jared lives in Utah with his wonderful family, where he writes by night and works in the Special Education Program by day.

Winning Races: Shifter

Shifters of the Cities



By Keith Baker

Illustration by Tyler Jacobson

From the moment of birth, shifters can feel the pull within their souls as the moon waxes and wanes. For all the distance between shifters and lycanthropes, shifters still hear the call of the moon within them. As children, shifters learn to control their transformations and to restrain the instincts of the beast. However, shifters can still hear the wolf's howl or the tiger's snarl in their thoughts, and when they close their eyes they dream of stalking their prey and tearing with tooth and claw. Some embrace these feelings fully; the rage of a shifter barbarian is that primal hunger unleashed, and a shifter druid transforms his or her body to reflect his or her inner beast. Others find more subtle ways to channel these natural instincts, but the spirit of the beast is always there. Whatever path a shifter chooses to follow, he or she has the soul of a predator . . . and each shifter can hear the moon calling.

Some shifters are loners, preferring to wander the world without bonds. Yet most crave the bond of the pack. For all that they wander, they are deeply loyal to their kin and those with whom they travel. Shifters who choose the path of adventure likely have good reasons for leaving their families to face danger with a group of strangers. These shifters might have been driven from their packs for a crime never mentioned to new friends; perhaps the shifter succumbed to the moon frenzy and killed a sibling. He or she might have lost a lover to a rival and left to escape that pain. It could be that the entire pack was killed, and that the shifter now seeks to hone skills and find allies who take vengeance when the time is right . . . or that he or she is seeking a new family to replace the lost one. Or it could be that the shifter adventures for the good of his or her pack—that this shifter hopes to defeat an enemy that threatens them all, or to acquire a treasure his or her family needs.

In playing a shifter, consider how these factors affect your life. What has drawn you to the surrogate pack of the adventuring company? How strong are your primal instincts? Do you grow tense and angry when the moon is full, or do you have full control of your wild blood? Most of all, remember that you are a predator—that whether you follow the path of the wizard or the rogue, a hunter within you searches for prey.

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URBAN SHIFTERS

In ages past both razorclaw and longtooth roamed across plains and woodlands, their only true home in the hearts of their family and friends. With the fall of Nerath, the wilds have become home to forces fearsome enough to strike terror into the heart of even the mightiest longtooth warrior. As the darkness rises, many shifters have been driven out of the woods and into the cities. Just as the rat has adjusted to urban life, these shifters are adapting to a world within city walls. Some adopt the customs of the dominant culture, forgetting their old ways and stories. Most take a different path, approaching the city like any other wilderness. Some live as scavengers, finding what they need in the refuse others have left behind them. Others are predators. The best of these shifters hunt criminals and those who endanger their cities; the worst prey on the weak and unfortunate.

Shifters that live in the sewers are called *rats*. Those who prefer the surface are known as *crows*; they make their homes in rooftops and high towers, which are areas those on the streets below never see. Though they are removed from nature, the animal spirit within both rat and crow still burns bright, and the primal classes are common among them. For all that he or she dwells in a sewer, the rat warden still feels the flow of the power of nature; the moon still shines above the city, fueling the barbarian's rage and the warden's endurance.

Urban packs are small, and they split when they grow too large. Shifters like to remain mobile, moving from bolthole to bolthole, and with too many packmates, it can be difficult to scrounge enough to survive. Although some packs split on racial lines, it's common for razorclaws and longtooth shifters to live together in city packs, each using unique gifts to help the band survive.

Rat or crow, these shifters are viewed with suspicion or fear by the people who share their city. They treat the city watch like any predator in the wild—learning its patterns and determining how best to avoid the watch while still getting what they need to survive. They have close ties to the black market, and they might sell information or work as couriers for those who trust them. Few know the secret ways of a city as well as the rats, and the crow can move from place to place more swiftly than a man walking the streets.

As an urban shifter, think about your childhood and the events that shaped your life. Did you live in the underworld, growing up among thieves and grifters and running from the watch? Or did you live in a wilderness of rooftops and towers, rarely descending to the streets below? Do you love the bustle of city streets, or do you prefer to look down on people from above?

BACKGROUNDS

The following backgrounds can help you flesh out your character's backstory.

Magpie: Living in the shadows of the city, your pack learned to find treasures where others see only trash. Your skill at scavenging and your expert knowledge of the city helped your people survive. You know the markets and midden heaps alike, and your keen eyes spot things others overlook. As you adventure, look for the value in things other people ignore; are you just going to throw that potion bottle away after drinking from it?

Associated Skills: Perception, Streetwise.

Stone Runner: You were born on the ledge of a tower, and you took your first steps on the edge of a roof. The city is your playground, and you love climbing its walls and leaping between its bridges; you feel most alive when you are in motion. Before adventuring, you might have found work as a messenger or courier. Now you use your gifts in battle, outmaneuvering your enemies with your dazzling speed and agility.

Associated Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics

Urban Shaman: The city is alive. You barter with the spirits of stone and steel, speaking with the ancient foundations of the city and the dominant force that drives it. Is it a fortress driven by war? A market with a dozen spirits of commerce all clamoring for attention? Is the heart of the city the great academy? You know, because you hear its voice. You barter with the spirits for the good of your people, and you use these same skills to keep peace between packs. You learned the ways of the wild from your ancestors, but in the city you feel most at home. If you are a shaman, consider how your spirit companions reflect your urban bond; a protector spirit could be the embodiment of strong city walls, and your stalker spirit is a glittering assemblage of steel blades.

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, Streetwise.

Background Benefit: While in an urban environment, you can substitute Streetwise for Nature when using a ritual that requires a Nature check.

Feats

The following feats provide your character with some options for his or her role in the world. Although they are useful for urban shifters, you don't have to have an urban background to take these feats.

Heroic Tier Feats

Feats in this section are available to characters of any level who meet the prerequisites.

Crow's Flight

Prerequisite: Shifter

Benefit: You ignore difficult terrain when you run. You gain a +2 feat bonus to Athletics and Acrobatics checks.

Unchained Beast

Prerequisite: Shifter, *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting* racial power

Benefit: When you use *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting*, you end one effect you have that dazes or weakens you.

Urban Predator

Prerequisite: Shifter

Benefit: When you roll an Athletics or Streetwise check, you can treat a d20 roll of 2–7 as if you had rolled an 8. A natural 1 is still treated as a 1.

Paragon Tier Feats

A character must be at least 11th level to select any of the feats in this section.

Draw Out the Beast

Prerequisite: Shifter

Benefit: Whenever you spend a healing surge to regain hit points, you can choose to treat yourself as being bloodied until the end of your next turn.

Predatory Spirit

Prerequisite: Shifter, *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting* racial power, any primal class

Benefit: When you use *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting*, once before the end of your next turn you can reroll one attack roll with a primal attack power that misses and take either result.

Epic Tier Feat

A character must be at least 21st level to select any of the feats in this section.

Primal Instincts

Prerequisite: Shifter

Benefit: When you use *longtooth shifting* or *razorclaw shifting*, until you are no longer bloodied your 1st-level at-will primal attack powers deal damage equal to your Strength modifier or your Wisdom modifier on a miss if they normally do not have an effect on a miss.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of the Dungeons & Dragons® game since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the *Eberron*® Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

Winning Races: Revenant

Your Revenant Assassin

By Matthew Sernett
Illustration by Tyler Jacobson

A revenant exists as a singularity. No guild of assassins or band of murderers counts a host of revenants among their number. No army of soldiers with dark intent marches down the shadowed path of the revenant. Even in the company of others, a revenant walks alone.

As a revenant, great powers returned your spirit to the world in a new body for a unique purpose. As a revenant assassin, great powers have forced your soul to be reborn for a dark cause. Whether given your new existence by the Raven Queen or some other entity, you exist to kill someone—or perhaps it is your destiny to kill hundreds.

Revenants make a great choice for assassin characters. The revenant ability score bonuses synch with two key ability scores for assassins, making revenants excellent choices for bleak disciple assassins. Revenants have access to a number of racial feats useful to an assassin, and picking one of the soul feats related to various races offers more choices for power and story customization. Multiclassing feats provide another opportunity to build a truly unique character.

Beyond these mechanical benefits, revenants make great assassins because it makes sense in the story of the world. Not only has the Raven Queen or some other deity given your character a new body and a mission, that being has also equipped your character with the power to achieve those ends.

Your revenant character is only half alive, and as an assassin, he or she possesses only a portion of his or her soul. The death you carry with you as part of your being has replaced a portion of your soul kept in the Shadowfell as assurance that you will complete your god-given tasks. Perhaps when you've done what's demanded of you, you will regain the lost shard of your soul and you will be allowed to pass on in peace. Maybe you hope for a return to life as well as spiritual wholeness with success in your task. Regardless, you know what is required of you, and it involves the spilling of a great deal of blood.

This article presents new game elements to reinforce the story connection between the revenant race and assassin class, and to provide them with unique mechanical benefits that assure that the revenant makes for one of the best choices when playing a character of the assassin class. If you play a revenant of another class, you might consider only one or two elements of this article useful, but you might also think about multiclassing as an assassin to see what new opportunities this article provides.

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What Is Your Purpose in Death?

As a revenant—particularly one gifted with shadow powers—your character should have a strong story connection to the Shadowfell and a good reason for being brought back. Consider the history of your revenant assassin and talk with your DM about the possibilities. You might remember more about your past life and the reason for your return to the world than is normal for a revenant character.

What does the power that brought you back want you to accomplish with your deadly skills? Perhaps you have a specific person from your past that you served or failed to kill that you are supposed to murder. Maybe a great leader or powerful being escaped death, and you are the instrument by which the Raven Queen brings that power to heel. Maybe some who loved you begged the Raven Queen for revenge for their deaths, and now you must kill all who had a hand in their deaths.

Who were you, and what do you want now? Are you righting your past wrongs with the sword? Are you fighting to return to the world of the living to rejoin someone you love? Perhaps you meet people in your adventures that you recognize, but you don't want them to know you as you are now. Do you seek the peace of death but owe souls to the Raven Queen due to some ill-made oath? Do you hope to earn your way into a better place in the afterlife by turning your powers upon children or friends you taught to be unholy terrors?

Revenant Assassin Feats

All of the feats below require a character to be both a revenant and an assassin. Such a character can choose most of these feats at any time, though a few are of paragon or epic level and have level prerequisites. Two excellent feats for revenant assassins appear in "The Assassin: Heroic Tier" in *Dragon* #379.

Heroic Tier Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisite.

Close to Death

Prerequisite: Revenant, assassin, *shadow step* power

Benefit: If you are bloodied, you do not need to meet the requirement for *shadow step* to gain the benefit of the effect of *shadow step*.

Concealing Shades

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping* racial power, assassin

Benefit: When you use *dark reaping*, you and each ally within 5 squares of you gains concealment until the end of your next turn.

Death Walk

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping* racial power, assassin, *shadow step* power

Benefit: When you use *dark reaping*, you can use *shadow step* as a free action. The creature triggering *dark reaping* counts as a creature for the purposes of this *shadow step*.

Death Wastes Nothing

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping*, assassin, *assassin's shroud* power

Benefit: When you use *dark reaping*, you can move any shrouds upon the triggering creature to one enemy within 10 squares of the triggering creature.

Quick and Dead

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping*, assassin, *shadow step* power

Benefit: When you use *dark reaping*, increase the distance you can teleport with *shadow step* by 1 square until the end of the encounter.

Raven Queen's Disciple

Prerequisite: Revenant, assassin, Bleak Disciple Guild Training

Benefit: When you gain temporary hit points from your Guild Training, increase the temporary hit points you gain by 1. If the unbloodied target you hit is undead or a shadow creature, increase the temporary hit points you gain by 2 instead.

Raven Queen's Sanction

Prerequisite: Revenant, assassin, *assassin's shroud* power

Benefit: When you invoke your shrouds on an undead or shadow creature and the attack misses, you do not subtract one shroud before determining damage.

Reaping Ki

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping*, assassin

Benefit: When you use *dark reaping*, the next time you miss with a ki focus before the end of your next

turn, the target takes necrotic damage equal to twice the implement's enhancement bonus.

Swallowed by Shadow

Prerequisite: Revenant, *dark reaping*, assassin

Benefit: When you use the *dark reaping* racial power, you can become invisible until the end of your next turn.

Paragon Tier Feats

Feats in this section are available to any characters of 11th level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Death Shroud

Prerequisite: 11th level, revenant, assassin, *shade form* power

Benefit: When you use *shade form* you become invisible to undead and shadow creatures for as long as your *shade form* lasts.

Specter of Death

Prerequisite: 11th level, revenant, assassin, *shade form* power

Benefit: While you are unconscious, you are insubstantial.

Epic Tier Feat

The feat in this section is available to any characters of 11th level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Vanish into Shadow

Prerequisite: 21st level, revenant, assassin, *shadow step* power

Benefit: When you use *shadow step*, you gain concealment until the start of your next turn.

Ki Focuses

Below you'll find a few ki focuses useful for revenant assassins. Characters of other classes or races can use some of these items depending on the class and race combination involved, but only the *ghost mask ki focus* avoids reliance on features of the revenant race and assassin class.

Certainty of Death Ki Focus Level 3+

You gaze at the statuette with a hole where its heart should be and look into yourself, focusing your ki on the void of life within it.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

Implement (Ki Focus)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 necrotic damage per plus
Power (Encounter): Free Action. *Trigger:* You use *dark reaping*. *Effect:* One creature adjacent to the creature that triggered *dark reaping* grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Cup of Death Ki Focus Level 3+

You lift the black cup to your lips and drink deep of the nothingness inside it. The emptiness that opens behind your eyes fills you with a sense of how much you can take from your foes.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

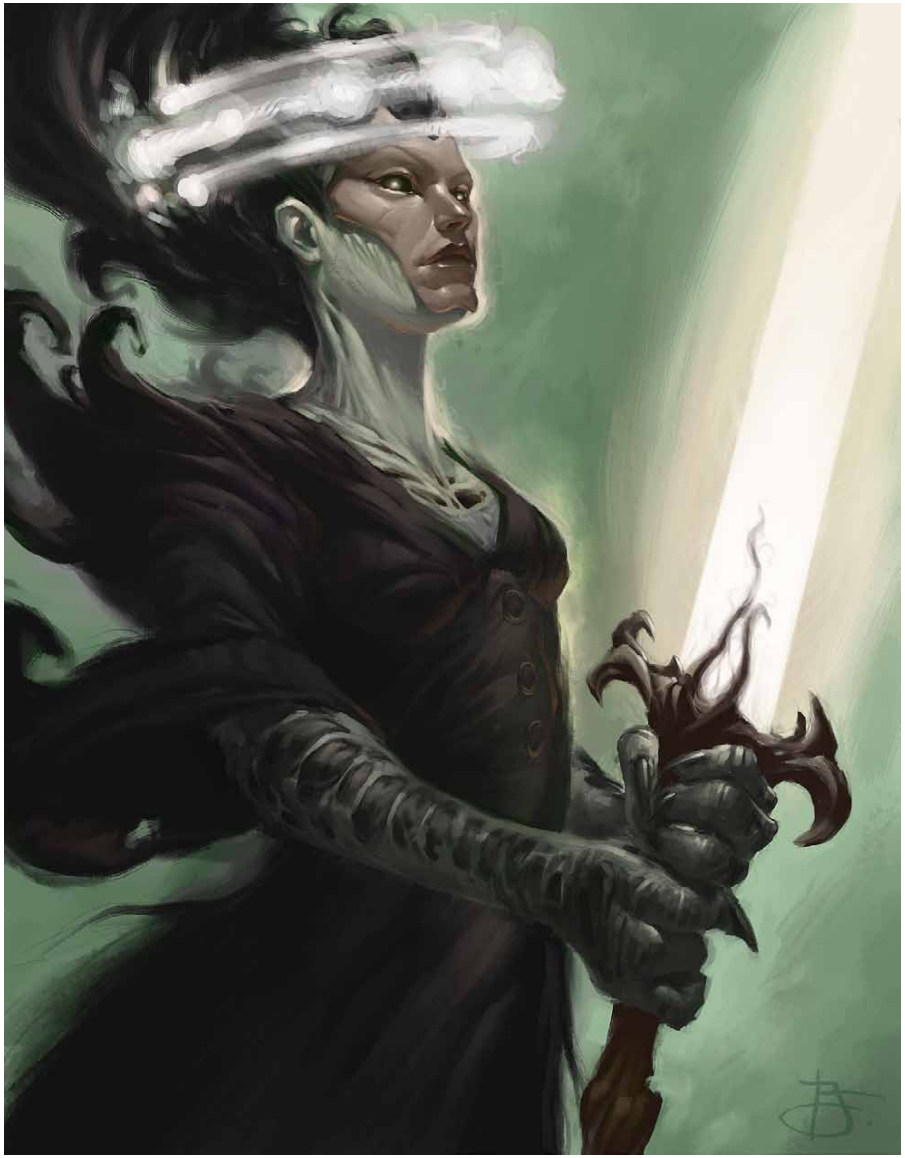
Implement (Ki Focus)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Property: Add 1 to the number of temporary hit points you gain for hitting an unbloodied foe due to Bleak Disciple Guild Training.
Level 13 or 18: Increase this bonus to 2.
Level 23 or 28: Increase this bonus to 3.
Power (Encounter): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an unbloodied enemy. *Effect:* You can shift a number of squares equal to your Constitution modifier.

Death Shroud Ki Focus Level 4+

These winding sheets for the dead appear to be woven with veins of blood. As you study their shining trails, you focus on your ability to ready foes for the grave.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Implement (Ki Focus)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, plus 1d6 damage for each of your shrouds on the target or each shroud you invoked on the target of this attack roll.
Power (Encounter): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit a target. *Effect:* You use *assassin's shroud* on the target. This use does not count against the limit of using *assassin's shroud* once per turn.



Ghost Mask Ki Focus — Level 4+

You focus your ki and can grasp the immaterial terror mask. When you hold the transparent and horrific visage to your own face, it vanishes within you, ready to emerge at your call.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Implement (Ki Focus)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 psychic damage per plus
Power (Encounter ✦ Psychic): Free Action. *Trigger:* You make an attack that targets AC. *Effect:* The attack targets Will instead. All damage from the attack is psychic damage.

Scavenger Bird Ki Focus — Level 2+

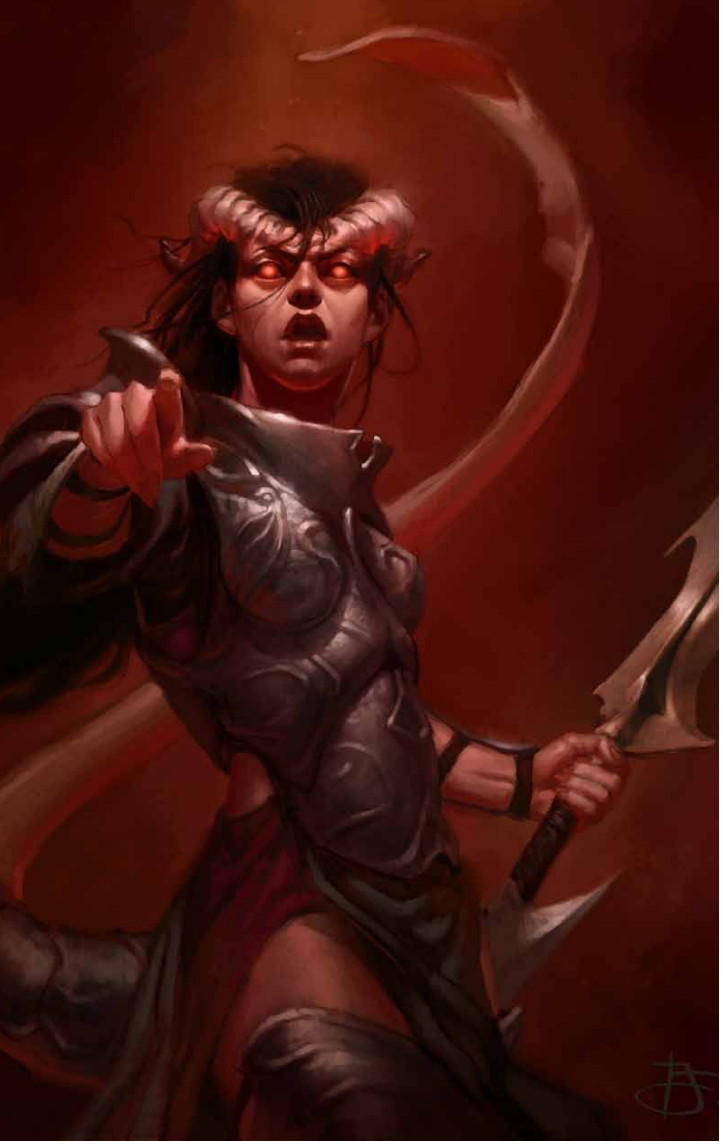
This onyx statue of a raven with outspread wings brings your mind to the Raven Queen and the task she set before you. She would not wish you to waste killing strokes upon the dying.

Lvl 2	+1	520 gp	Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp
Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Implement (Ki Focus)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, and any shrouds you chose to invoke before the attack deal 2 extra damage.
Power (At-Will): Free Action. *Trigger:* You hit an enemy. *Effect:* You move all your shrouds on the enemy you hit to another enemy within 10 squares of you (up to the maximum number of shrouds allowed).

About the Author

Matthew Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast who splits his time between Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering[a]. Recent credits include *Player's Handbook Racesä: Tieflings*, *The Plane Aboveä: Secrets of the Astral Sea*, and *Magic the Gathering: Zendikar*. When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about.



Winning Races: Tiefling

Bloodlines of Bael Turath: The Blightseers

By Peter Schaefer
Illustration by Tyler Jacobson

The diaspora that followed the fall of Bael Turath is a wound on the face of history. Dozens of conflicting reports on the nation's final days, who ruled, and which factions held power remain in the scrolls to confound historians and others who are interested in truth. One account boasts that Bael Turath's long-sighted plan included bewildering its enemies before the enemies returned to power. The only certainty is that the children of Bael Turath, the tieflings, bear a certain inherited appearance and power from their association with the dark powers.

Besides a tangle in the weave of history, the empire also left behind multiple bloodlines. Most today know tieflings as creatures with a penchant and a power for vengeance. A smaller bloodline called blightseers, whose progenitors were bound to Baalzebul, survived and had the ability to see how something will appear once it has fallen into ruin. That potential is always part of what a scion of this legacy sees. When they choose, they can cause what they look upon to decay into what they see. Where their eyes fall, things suffer the worst effects of time's passage. Milk sours, wood rots, iron rusts, mirrors tarnish and crack, and so on. With their gaze of ruin, they efficiently destroy their enemies by creating weak points where they can then strike.

Tieflings endowed with the gaze of ruin are masters of petty retribution. The ability to glare at a rude traveler and cause his bootlaces to snap, or to glance sidelong at a brusque bartender's wooden mugs so the bottoms rot and fall out, is satisfying for the punitive minded. This lineage of tiefling tends to produce thinkers—people who prefer taking a single effective shot rather than swinging multiple times to produce the desired result.

Some tieflings of the most populous lineage are poorly suited to wield infernal wrath. These occasionally find a means to replace their inherited nature with that of a lesser Turathi lineage, instead donning the mantle of misfortune or taking up the gaze of ruin.

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Tiefling Adventurers

Three sample tiefling adventurers are described below.

Arturus is a tiefling wizard with an enduring interest in the Astral Sea and astral dominions. His parents couldn't discern why he was such a morose child until he learned to speak and it became clear that his sight was tainted with visions of decay and ruin. Arturus came to hate what his blood forced him to see. Only eternal things could ignore the passage of time, and when he first laid eyes on an enchanted bag, he stared in wonder. If magic could make things immune to rot, he would make magic. His career as a wizard has focused on a search to grant the world an eternal nature similar to the domains of the gods. In conjunction with several allies, he has built many everlasting objects, but he still seeks a way to transfer that nondecaying nature to the world in one great act of magic.

Find the proudest bard in the city, and it is Indiara. She practices hours every day at each skill she prizes: song, instruments, swordplay, storytelling, magic, historical recitations, and more. Indiara strives to be the best in part because she sees the ruin that comes to all things, and she seeks to become a legend that will endure—a story that will be shared with wonder between the last two people in the world before everything ends. And if she needs to glare and cause a competitor's lute string snap to remain the best, so be it.

Tearin is a psion who learned her mental powers when she compartmentalized the two things she saw when she opened her eyes—the whole and the ruined—so she could use each as was necessary. When she achieved this, she found that separating the two integral parts of her released a form of energy that she could wield as psionic magic. As she masters her powers, she travels with a group that includes two warforged. She finds the living constructs, which are objects that appear identical to both her forms of vision, fascinating.

New Feats

The following feats are available to tiefling characters.

Heroic Tier Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisites.

Benefit of Foresight

Prerequisite: Tiefling, Gaze of Ruin feat

Benefit: When you make an Intimidate check against a creature you can see, you can roll twice and take either result.

Gaze of Ruin [Tiefling Bloodline]

Prerequisite: Tiefling

Benefit: You gain *gaze of ruin* as an encounter power. In addition, you gain a +2 bonus to Insight and Perception checks made against other tieflings.

Gaze of Ruin — **Feat Power**

Your gaze causes foodstuffs to become inedible, a wood door to rot, armor to grow brittle, or a weapon to rust.

Encounter
Minor Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One object
Effect: The target gains vulnerability to all damage equal to one-half your level + your Intelligence modifier until the end of your next turn. If the target is a weapon, attacks with it take a penalty to damage rolls equal your Intelligence modifier (minimum 1) until the end of your next turn. If the target is armor, a creature wearing it takes a –2 penalty to AC until the end of your next turn.

Lasting Decay

Prerequisite: Tiefling, Gaze of Ruin feat

Benefit: When you use *gaze of ruin*, the target's vulnerability to all damage lasts until the end of the encounter or until you can no longer see the target.

Paragon Tier Feat

The feat in this section is available to any characters of 11th level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Ruin of Flesh

Prerequisite: 11th level, tiefling, Gaze of Ruin feat

Benefit: When you use *gaze of ruin* on an object being worn or wielded by a creature, that creature gains vulnerable to all damage equal to your Intelligence modifier until the end of your next turn.

Epic Tier Feat

The feat in this section is available to any characters of 21st level and above who meet the prerequisites.

Sweeping Gaze

Prerequisite: 21st level, tiefling, Gaze of Ruin feat

Benefit: When you use *gaze of ruin*, you can target one or two objects instead of just one.

Paragon Path: Seer of Endings

"In my eyes, you're already dead."

Prerequisite: Tiefling, *gaze of ruin* racial power

A small faction of tieflings views the world through a veil of decay that shrouds the ugly and the beautiful alike with the appearance of death and rot. Some seek ways to minimize the influence of these visions on their lives. Other blightseers embrace the knowledge that the gaze of ruin grants them. They study the appearance of a thing as it is now and as it is in its ruined state, and over time they learn to read their visions for meanings about the present. The destruction they see serves as a constant source of omens about creatures' fates and instructions on how to bring about those fates.

Through ardent research, you have developed a catalogue of what your visions mean. How you act on this knowledge depends on your goals. The information is yours to use as a superlative assassin or as a way to avert terrible fates.

Seer of Endings Path Features

Death-Seer's Action (11th level): When you spend an action point, one creature you can see gains vulnerable to your attacks equal to your Intelligence modifier until the end of your next turn.

Weakness of the Hale (11th level): You always have combat advantage against any nonminion creature you can see that is not bloodied.

Puissant Gaze (16th level): Increase the vulnerability your *gaze of ruin* causes by your Intelligence modifier, increase the penalty to damage rolls it causes by 2, and increase the penalty to AC it causes by 1.

Seer of Endings Powers

Deathly Glare — Seer of Endings Attack 11

Your vision of your foe's corpse forces itself on reality, withering your victim rapidly.

Encounter
Standard Action — Personal

Effect: Make an attack with one of your 1st-level at-will attack powers that targets only one creature. If that attack hits its target, choose one of the following effects:
- ✦ The attack deals 2d10 extra damage.
- ✦ The target is weakened until the end of your next turn.

Foretold Death — Seer of Endings Utility 12

Having seen your enemy's death, you react swiftly when it comes.

Encounter
Immediate Reaction — Personal

Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares of you drops to 0 hit points.

Effect: You move your speed, shift 1 square, or stand up from being prone.

Visions of Death — Seer of Endings Attack 20

You show your foe its own death, while forcing new vulnerabilities upon it.

Daily ✦ Psychic
Standard Action — Personal

Effect: Make an attack with one of your 1st-level at-will attack powers that targets only one creature. That attack deals 3d10 extra psychic damage. If your attack misses, the target takes half damage. Regardless of whether the attack hits, the target gains vulnerable 10 to all damage (save ends).

About the Author

Peter Schaefer is a paragon of trust. He never doubts the veracity of any statement, which is perhaps the reason why he belongs to all religions, has helped retrieve money for four members of the Nigerian government, has eight separate fast-track investments that are soon to return 550% returns, and has a full complement of those really absorbent little towels. It also means that he's still trying to figure out how to use the real magic from the books he works on as an RPG developer, such as *Adventurer's Vault 2*, *Divine Power*, and many *D&D Insider* articles. Nothing anyone has told him yet has worked, including that thing with the chicken and the stapler, but he's certain he's just doing it wrong.

Channel Divinity: Pelor
The Students of Aurtus

By Craig Campbell
Illustration by Sarah Stone

"I shall stand against the darkness armed with the weapons history provides me. I shall teach those in need so that they might learn from the past and be prepared for what the future holds. Together, we shall persevere in the divine light of Pelor's guidance."

—Credo of the Students of Aurtus

Pelor's radiance shines across all creation, bringing light to the darkest places of the world. Clerics of the sun god ease suffering and stand watch against the evils that permeate every fiber of the cosmos. To a one, they worship the sun as the giver of life, reveling in summer as a time of joy and the harvest as the stepping stone to a new, better tomorrow.

However, Pelor is also the keeper of time. Some of his faithful focus their efforts on this oft-forgotten domain. One group of those who do are known as the Students of Aurtus.

Origin of the Students of Aurtus

Roughly 130 years ago, during his teenage years, a boy named Aurtus hired himself out as a messenger, delivering messages and packages in the city of Fallcrest. When he could afford a horse, he began delivering messages throughout the Nentir Vale, sometimes riding with trade caravans and sometimes braving the dangers of the wilderness alone. In time, he gained an excellent reputation as a timely and discreet messenger, earning the nickname "Goodspeed."

During his travels, he visited many towns and settlements, and, in the process, saw the problems that people faced. It struck him that people didn't learn from their mistakes or from the mistakes of others.

At age 27, Aurtus heard the call of Pelor and began studying at the House of the Sun in Fallcrest. Rising quickly through the ranks, Aurtus became one of the most trusted and respected priests of Pelor in the city.

Ninety years ago, when Fallcrest fell to the Bloodspears, Aurtus was one of the few survivors. He saw the fall of his home as a calling to serve Pelor in a new

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way. As the people of Fallcrest struggled to rebuild their home, the forty-year-old Aurtus refocused his efforts in service to Pelor.

Aurtus found strength in studying and, more importantly, understanding the mistakes of the past. He began collecting histories of all the nearby lands and compiling them into a great book he called *The Living Tome of Pelor*. Eventually, he began dissecting these histories in an attempt to understand where people went wrong. He hoped that the followers of Pelor could use this knowledge to enlighten the people of the Nentir Vale, teach them to avoid the hazards of history, and in so doing, bring a brighter tomorrow to all.

As Fallcrest grew anew, several followers of Pelor found merit in Aurtus's work. These priests and acolytes began working with Aurtus to teach the people of Fallcrest and others about the follies of the past, so that events such as the fall of Fallcrest could be avoided in the future.

They came to call themselves the Students of Aurtus.

Living in the Now

The Students of Aurtus are a loose affiliation of clerics, acolytes, and other worshipers of Pelor who seek to harness knowledge of the past as a means to make a better future for all.

As members of Pelor's faithful, they seek to bring light to the world, providing compassion and aid to those in need. However, they also see Pelor's influence as an opportunity to teach the people of the world how they might avoid the mistakes of the past.

Members of the order refer to themselves as students, though they might better be called teachers. Little organizational hierarchy exists in the order since all members are encouraged to take on challenges as equals.

The only title within the order is that of Keeper of the Living Tome. One member of the order, typically the eldest, is charged with administrating *The Living Tome of Pelor* (now a collection of seven thick books) wherein are written the histories of nearby lands. Students can access *The Living Tome of Pelor* at any time by speaking with the Keeper at the House of the Sun in Fallcrest.

Members of the order don't work only with other followers of Pelor. Students seek to develop personal relationships with clerics of Avandra, since her portfolio includes change for the better and travel. Students seek out those of her followers who might provide stories and histories that the Students of Aurtus can use to augment their own understanding of history. Additionally, Students of Aurtus seek to work with followers of Ioun, so as to further strengthen their knowledge of the past and prophecies that might guide them in their endeavors.

One Eye on the Past

Students of Aurtus view the whole of time as a living, constantly evolving tapestry of events that influence each other in myriad ways. They refer to time and history as "The Tapestry."

Although the study of history is, to most, an exercise in learning names and dates, Students of Aurtus view their studies as a means to an end. They don't just study the names and dates. They seek to discover how past events influenced later events, as well as how and why people make the same mistakes. They work to find the defining moments where bad decisions were made so that they might avoid these mistakes in the future.

All members of the order spend significant periods of time poring over *The Living Tome of Pelor,* seeking insight into the past and preparing them to teach others in the future. The most dedicated spend days in study and meditation whenever the opportunity arises. Whenever two or more Students of Aurtus gather, their time together devolves into heated discussions of history.

One Eye on the Future

Students of Aurtus use their understanding of past events as a stepping stone to their primary role as teachers. All members of the order are charged with bringing enlightenment by instructing people in their future endeavors. They cite specific instances in history as a way to exemplify their beliefs and better influence those around them. To this end, Students of Aurtus are viewed as a bit haughty with regard to their knowledge of history, though members view themselves as leaders whose words should be heeded.

Additionally, Students of Aurtus actively seek out those with specific experience in recent tragedies to add their experiences to the pages of *The Living Tome of Pelor.* Rare is the Student of Aurtus who is not trained in History and Diplomacy, since these skills are paramount in their role as teachers.

In the past decade or so, the most devout followers of Pelor have recognized the Students of Aurtus as being instrumental in their future endeavors. Students meet with the high priest of Pelor in Fallcrest to advise him in their particular areas of expertise. The order sees this as a great victory—the culmination of Aurtus's intentions, established so long ago.

Students of Aurtus Feats

The Students of Aurtus have developed several methods by which they can learn from recent personal experiences to benefit them in future endeavors. The following feats are favored by members of the order.

Heroic Tier Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

See It Coming

Prerequisite: Dex 13, Wis 13

Benefit: When a creature flanking you hits you, being flanked does not cause you to grant combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Memory of Strikes Past

Prerequisite: 6th level or higher utility power

Benefit: The *memory is a weapon* feat power replaces one of your 6th-level or higher utility powers.

Memory Is a Weapon — Feat Utility Power

When you miss an enemy with an attack, you remember your error and call upon this memory to strike true.

Encounter
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You miss with a melee or ranged attack roll.
Effect: You gain a +3 power bonus to attack rolls against the triggering attack roll's target until the end of your next turn.

Paragon Tier Feat

Any feat in this section is available to a character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Critical Targeting

Benefit: When you score a critical hit with a melee or ranged attack, the attack deals 2 extra damage and you gain a +2 bonus to damage rolls against the creature you hit until the end of the encounter.

Magic that Learns

Late in his life, Aurtus crafted a mace that learned while he fought with it, and he passed the knowledge of creating such a weapon on to his students. Members of the order craft such weapons for their own or their comrades' use.

Learning Weapon — Level 5+

This weapon learns as you fight a specific foe, helping you to hit and strike vital spots repeatedly.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Any
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Property: Each time you miss a target with this weapon, you gain a cumulative +1 power bonus (up to the weapon's enhancement bonus) to your next attack roll with this weapon against the same target before the end of the encounter. This bonus ends when you attack a different target or when you hit.
Property: Each time you hit a target with this weapon, you gain a +2 power bonus to the first damage roll on your next attack with this weapon against the same target before the end of your next turn.
Level 15 or 20: +4 power bonus to the damage roll.
Level 25 or 30: +6 power bonus to the damage roll.

About the Author

Craig Campbell was suckered into playing D&D in 1990 when some of his college friends told him he needed to get out less. In the time since, he's devoured many sourcebooks, transforming himself into a zombielike creature that constantly seeks to tell amazing stories and eat the brains of his players. Hailing from northeastern Wisconsin (go Packers!), he currently lives in Marietta, Georgia with his all-consuming love of bad movies.

Channel Divinity: Erathis

By Elliott Hoffman
Illustration by Ben Wootten

The world is a scattered mess of wilds and ruins. The fragments of civilization and order that persist today are quiet echoes of the nations that flourished in ages past. From her throne in Celestia, the goddess Erathis commands her devoted to piece together these fragments and forge anew powerful mortal kingdoms.

Erathis is worshiped in small ways all across the world. People commonly utter a brief prayer to the goddess when they enter a new city for the first time, and her temples frequently double as courthouses and meeting halls. For this reason, perhaps, the typical stereotype of an Erathis worshiper is that of a fussy, office-coddled old magistrate tutting at untidy desks and filing paperwork into the late hours. This stereotype is egregiously false. The champions of Erathis have been many—leaders, generals, and battle-scarred kings, each a bastion of civilized might. Under her banner, armies have devastated their enemies in stunning displays of orderly, efficient warfare.

This article should help a player who wants to explore his or her character's devotion more fully. It contains new backgrounds, feats, and a paragon path that can set a character apart from others who revere Erathis, as well as general information about the goddess.

Adventuring for Erathis

In a world of roads to travel and injustices to answer, anyone might be swayed by Erathis's teachings. An adventurer who worships Erathis might be a city dweller from birth who seeks to uphold the law and spread civilization's bounty to the darkest stretches of the world. He or she might also be a refugee from a more savage land, turning to Erathis for the comfort and protection of city walls.

Anyone who values community, innovation, and law might take up her cause. Martial and arcane characters such as fighters, warlords, and wizards—characters who value organization and order—are common examples. Divine characters who do not specifically worship Erathis might nonetheless respect some of her teachings—worshipers of Bahamut and Moradin especially. Because of her emphasis on the importance of civilization, Erathis clashes somewhat with the predilections of some primal characters. Exceptions exist, of course; a primal character who worships Erathis might see the value of civilization

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and seek to balance it with nature's providence. Others who revere the primal spirits see civilization as a natural outgrowth of cultures that have found ways to harness their own energy in a productive fashion. Those Erathis worshipers who respect the natural world, don't exploit its resources unnecessarily, or don't seek fell allies not of the mortal realm find they have little at odds with such primal individuals.

Backgrounds

Before your character adventured, he or she gained faith and skill in some manner. The following backgrounds are only a few of the possibilities; each of them is especially appropriate for Erathis's devoted.

Lawmaker: You served as a politician or judge. The law was literally in your hands as warrants and statutes passed under your pen. You spent your days surrounded by both sides of the legal world—your colleagues who worked with the law, and the criminals who railed against it. You might have toiled to maintain the status quo, but you might also have been instrumental in making radical changes to the government. Regardless, you probably made at least a few enemies of the criminals you locked up or the opponents you outvoted. Do these grudges persist?

Either way, that career is over, and you have turned to adventuring. Why? Did scandal rock your office? Did you become disillusioned with how little you could accomplish from behind a desk? The memories of those days will remain with you, but what they mean to you is a matter of circumstance. Do you adventure to preserve the legal system you once upheld, or to revolutionize it from without?

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, History

Ward of the State: Orphaned or abandoned at a young age, you spent your childhood in the care of a magistrate or some other public official. You might have been used as a living and breathing symbol of legislative compassion—whether real or phony. Do those memories still sting? Although your guardian treated you kindly enough, he or she was frequently preoccupied by matters of state. Did you feel neglected during his or her absence, or did you find it freeing? Did your guardian's world of political machinations appeal to you, or did you find it rigid and boring?

You might adventure in your guardian's name, fighting to keep the peace for a nation you grew to love. Conversely, you might adventure as a way of shaking off the monotonous memories of a stale childhood. Does your guardian approve of the life you lead? Is he or she aware of it?

Associated Skills: Insight, Streetwise

Founder: You helped found a community. Where was it? Why was it created? You might have helped to plan the settlement, or you might have spent some time laying bricks with your own two hands. Was the process part of a simpler life, or was it a prelude to your adventuring career? Did you learn to do battle while patrolling its half-constructed walls? A town with your own personal stamp on it might serve as a worthy base of operations, and its people might clamor for your protection.

When was the last time you were there? What was once a small but promising settlement might now be a thriving city—or a ghost town.

Associated Skills: Athletics, History

Character Options

Regardless of how he or she came to follow Erathis, the adventurer who worships her is a ruthless warrior whose cunning tactics are built upon the stories of history's mightiest empires. In combat, he or she keeps close to allies and aids them when possible. The following feats and paragon path are available for the most devoted worshipers of Erathis.

Heroic Tier Feats

The following feats are suitable for any character who meets the prerequisite.

Shield of Hestavar

Prerequisite: Defender role, must worship Erathis

Benefit: While adjacent to you, an ally gains resist 2 to attacks from enemies marked by you. This resistance increases to 4 at 11th level and 6 at 21st level.

Speaker of Hestavar

Prerequisite: Controller role, must worship Erathis

Benefit: Whenever you subject an enemy to forced movement and you end that movement in a square adjacent to an ally, that enemy grants combat advantage to the ally until the end of your next turn.

Spirit of Hestavar

Prerequisite: Leader role, must worship Erathis

Benefit: While adjacent to you, an ally gains a +2 feat bonus to his or her healing surge value. This bonus increases to +4 at 11th level and +6 at 21st level.

Sword of Hestavar

Prerequisite: Striker role, must worship Erathis

Benefit: While an enemy grants combat advantage to you, each ally adjacent to you gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls against that enemy. This bonus increases to +4 at 11th level and +6 at 21st level.

Gatekeeper of the Golden Palace

"Stand with me—and by the fires of Hestavar, we'll drop them one by one!"

Prerequisite: 11th level, must worship Erathis

You exemplify the virtues of Erathis. In life, you abide by and enforce the laws of your people. You have defended your home against myriad creeping evils and brought light to the dark places in the world. In battle, you know you are only as powerful as the warriors who fight beside you, and you strive to guide them to victory just as fervently as you take up a weapon. Erathis has taken special notice of your devotion and your prowess, and she has blessed you with a powerful touch of her golden light.

To be a gatekeeper of the golden palace, as you are, one does not need a specific power source or skill set. One needs only to value the lives of their allies as strongly as their own, and to know that it is more important for an arrow to strike its target than it is to be the one who fires the arrow. With your allies at your side and Erathis in your heart, you intend to litter the battlefield with fallen enemies—even if you never lift a sword.

Gatekeeper of the Golden Palace Path Features

Communal Action (11th level): You can spend an action point to give an ally adjacent to you an action point.

Strength in Numbers (11th level): You and any ally adjacent to you gain a bonus to saving throws equal to the number of allies adjacent to you.

One for All (16th level): When you end your turn, each ally adjacent to you can make a saving throw.

Gatekeeper of the Golden Palace Prayers

Ignite the Forge — Gatekeeper of the Golden Palace — Attack 11

Divine flames course ahead of your attack and leap to your friends' weapons and implements, wreathing them in shining flame.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fire, Radiant; Implement or **Weapon**
Standard Action — **Personal**

Effect: You use an at-will attack power. If you hit, the damage is fire and radiant damage. Each ally adjacent to you gains a +5 power bonus to damage rolls until the end of your next turn and the damage they deal is fire and radiant damage.

Hestavar's Blessing — Gatekeeper of the Golden Palace — Utility 12

You sway an ally's fortune with a simple blessing from the Bright City.

Encounter ✦ Divine
Minor Action — **Melee** 1
Target: One ally

Effect: The target can make a saving throw or spend a healing surge. In addition, the target can shift 3 squares to a square adjacent to at least one of his or her allies as a free action.

Citizen's Arrest — Gatekeeper of the Golden Palace — Attack 20

You are wreathed in crackling bolts of Erathis's might, empowering your normal spells or attacks. As you spend the power, it leaves a spark in each of your allies.

Daily ✦ Divine, Radiant; Implement or **Weapon**
Standard Action — **Personal**

Effect: You use an at-will attack power. Choose one target of the attack. If you hit that target, it is stunned (save ends). If you miss that target, it is dazed (save ends). If you hit or miss that target, until the end of the encounter when an ally adjacent to you hits the target, that ally can push the target 2 squares or slow the target until the end of its next turn.

About the Author

Elliott Hoffman is thrilled to be adding to the D&D® canon for the first time. He lives in Coralville, Iowa, where he drinks too much coffee and doesn't roll enough dice. He thanks Q and Van for all the brainstorming that eventually led to this article.

Guilds & Groups: Shades of Darkness

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Jason Juta

"Now friend, don't get all weepy on me. Yes, you don't want to die. I'm sure you didn't mean to create all those undead and kill all those people. Honestly, I don't care about the undead. And I really don't care about those people. What I care about is your master. Now don't be coy with me. The Hooded One. Vecna. That's who I'm talking about. Don't deny it now. See, you have his tattoo on your neck. Oh, you reject Vecna? I see. You know that's a shame, really. Without your god, who're you gonna pray to now?"

Oppressive gloom, pervasive melancholy, creeping things lurking in the shadows, and horrors screaming and wailing on reality's fringes combine to give the Shadowfell its sinister reputation. The Shadowfell, however, is indifferent to morality. It might be gloomy, and it might foment grief, but it is no more and no less evil than the Feywild. However, something about this plane draws some of the worst people into its chilling embrace. Souls are here, to be sure, and souls contain great power, but something else is here as well. It is as if all the darkness and death invites those with unspeakable desires to walk its shadowed roads. The Shadowfell acts as a haven for those who have nowhere else to turn due to the repercussions of crimes they have committed or evils they inherited. Thus few honest folk venture into its misty expanse without good cause.

Wickedness might thrive in the Shadowfell, but not all welcome its presence. Some recoil at the growing corruption and are appalled at its free reign. Several of these good people take the fight to the darkness in the Shadowfell just as others do in the world beyond, and a few organized efforts against the interlopers have gained strength. Among them, none instill more fear than the Shades of Darkness.

History

The goals the Shades of Darkness organization seeks to achieve predate the organization's existence, and these goals find their roots in the hearts and minds of those born into this plane. Shadowfell denizens

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have little love for outsiders, having seen the horrors perpetrated by intruders in the decaying cities and scars left by the death giants. They know firsthand the ghouls scouring the landscape for warm flesh and the vile priests performing rituals in the plane's darkest corners. Much of the malice one finds in the Shadowfell stems from the abiding hatred for these interlopers, but until the Shades of Darkness group came to power, no successful organized effort to drive out the enemies had been made.

The Shades of Darkness group was formed long ago by a mysterious figure named Mourne. Few believe the lich exists today, though rumors claim that he hides in undead-infested tunnels below Gloomwrought in the Shadowfell. A refugee from the natural world, he retreated to the Shadowfell's darkest corners, losing himself among Moil's icy towers where he could study the dark arts without interference. Legend holds Mourne was of two worlds—one light and the other dark—a child from an unhappy union of drow and eladrin. In his cursed blood, he found the penchant for wickedness his magic demanded, but in the light he felt shame and guilt for the evils he worked. Yet in Moil, his light faltered, since Acererak taught him much of necromancy in exchange for the tortured soul residing in the broken necromancer.

Armed with necromantic secrets, Mourne performed dreadful hexes and raised up legions of dead from the abundant corpses littering the city. He indulged in vices that cannot be conceived, all to sate his curiosity even as his wickedness consumed his mind. Yet for all his crimes, the lingering doubts remained and, as his evil mounted, so too did his revulsion at what he had become.

Rather than accept the blame for the horror he created, he looked to Acererak and others like Acererak as the cause of evil and his current situation. He saw in himself a pawn, moved about as the dark powers willed with little regard for how he was used. He knew his master would discard him as he had countless others, so he fled the City that Waits to find a new haven where he could start anew.

He washed up on Gloomwrought's shores, then he slipped into the changing city and hid in its buildings or in the shifting sewers. He knew it was too late to repent, because his soul was lost and death's corruption infused his body. He lamented his accursed existence, but always plotted revenge for wrongs done not only to him but the entire plane he called his home. Through the years of his wretchedness, he found followers who shared his visions and his anger, and together they found the will to combat their corruptors. In time, these followers gathered allies of their own and thus the Shades of Darkness group was born.

Organization

"Oh, I'm a member alright. Been so for some twenty years. The Conclave doesn't expect much, from my experience. I've had only one mission: Watch this merchant named Hyrum. The Conclave claimed he was a secret cultist of Vecna. He died five years ago. Since I've never gotten new orders, I've kept old Hyrum in the closet over there. Want to see him?"

The Shades of Darkness is a moderate-sized organization spread across the Shadowfell, natural world, and elsewhere. Spread as widely as they are, most agents work alone, hiding within other groups, adventuring parties, temples, and secular institutions. Isolation means agents can go years without contact with the larger organization, and many go their entire lives awaiting orders that never come. Others, however, find their lives shaped by the Shades' goals, undertaking mission after mission, often with little explanation for their purpose or consequences.

All members receive orders from the Conclave, a grim assembly made up of shadowborn humans, shadar-kai, revenants, and at least one dhampyr. The Conclave does not often deal directly with its membership, instead relying on intermediaries to recruit new agents, distribute orders, and correct errors in those Shades who lose sight of the organization's purpose. Among the few cells where agents work in teams, some whisper that Mourne lingers still and commands the entire organization through his personal agents who make up the Conclave.

Philosophy

"Shadow is neither good nor evil. It just is. Those who pervert the darkness for evil ends are as much our foes as are those who cleanse it to serve a greater good."

To the Shades, the Shadowfell is neither good nor evil. It is a place and nothing more. Yet it is vulnerable. Those with strong personalities can change the Shadowfell, as is evident in the dark lords' domains or in the dark lands, where necromantic energies run unchecked. Perhaps the greatest danger is in the great powers who seek to exploit the plane, because their influence only worsens the Shadowfell's bleak atmosphere when they loose ghouls, abominations, and other horrors to terrorize and reform the plane in their own image.

Thus, those in the Shades of Darkness devote themselves to shielding the Shadowfell from the

forces capable of altering the plane for good or ill. Foremost of their enemies is Vecna, since the subversive god infects the plane like a cancer, but they also challenge Orcus, Doresain, and Zehir too. The members of the Shades have no love for the Raven Queen and do not count themselves as her subjects, though their aims might overlap from time to time. She, like their enemies, is not of the Shadowfell, but her staunch neutrality keeps the Shades focused elsewhere. The Raven Queen does not interfere with the organization, and some believe she even instructs her sorrowsworn to avoid them since each success won by the Shades of Darkness helps keep her throne secure.

Headquarters

"Gloomwrought turns away no one, but do not mistake its open gates as welcome. The city is alive, friend, and those who anger it have a tendency to disappear."

Gloomwrought (*Manual of the Planes*, page 58) is a sprawling metropolis contained behind black walls studded with leprous green lanterns. This city of high towers has narrow streets, deep shadows, and strange people. Nothing stays the same for long in Gloomwrought, because the streets move, changing course overnight. Buildings might vanish, swallowing up their inhabitants, and an entirely different structure appears in its place overnight. It is all these things and more, but members of the Shades of Darkness call it home.

The Shades of Darkness organization commands an old opera house not far from the inky black waters fronting the disused piers. The building is one of the few fixed sites in the city, not having been transformed or altered in any significant way in over a century. The opera house, called the Theater of Sighs, contains a training facility for new recruits, residences for active members, a library, an armory, and access to the tunnels below. The stage is set aside for interrogation, and members learn the finer points of torture from comfortable chairs in the large theater.

Enemies and Rivals

Those in the Shades of Darkness have few allies in the Shadowfell and fewer in the world beyond it. They hunt Vecna cultists, rooting out the secretive cabals and putting all to the sword. The members wage war against Doresain's ghouls, doing their part to thwart Orcus's efforts to claim the Raven Queen's mantle. They even fight Zehir serpents and assassins, watchful for the vile signs of their passing, though they have little luck in cornering these elusive killers.

Honest folk want nothing to do with the Shades' crusades against powerful enemies, because members of the Shades have proven time and again that they care nothing for the innocents who get in their way. Even those who have compassion are still distrusted because the organization keeps company with dark forces. But if being friendless and feared bothers members of the Shades, they would never have joined the organization in the first place.

Joining the Shades of Darkness

"After everything you've told me, why in the Nine Hells would I want to join?"

Members of the Shades of Darkness are the first to admit their organization is not for everyone. They have no room for virtue and morality, just as they despise corruption and wickedness. They want only those who can think for themselves and those who don't let codes of conduct blind them to what needs to be done. This said, good and evil don't matter much and the very best souls and the worst are among the Shades.

Those in the Shades of Darkness watch for candidates with talents for assassination, subterfuge, and secrecy. Assassins, rogues, and rangers are welcome, as are some warlocks (especially those of the Dark Pact), psions, and monks. The Shades do not often affiliate with primal characters (they are too reckless and unsubtle) or divine characters (dogma tends to interfere with the organization's murky missions).

Backgrounds

The following backgrounds are suitable for any who seek to have the Shades of Darkness as part of a character's backstory.

Domain Refugee: You were born in a domain of dread, a region shaped and controlled by a dark power whose corruption and evil is often boundless. Who was this dark master and what was his or her crime? Since few escape these domains, what was your story? How did you escape? Did you leave

anyone behind you? Once you were free, where did you go?

Associated Skills: Bluff, Stealth

Reformed Villain: Although you have repented for your wickedness, your crimes and vile acts haunt you still. What did you do to qualify as a villain? What was your objective? Why did you want it? What did you do to achieve it? Did you achieve it? For you to be reformed, there had to be contrition. What changed for you? How do you now make amends?

Associated Languages: Giant, Goblin, Primordial

Wrongs to be Righted: Dark forces in the Shadowfell wronged you in some way. You survived the experience, but you are left with bitter hatred for your persecutors. Who was wronged and in what way? How did you survive? Do you get back at the people that wronged you or are they still out there?

Associated Skills: Endurance, Intimidate

REQUIREMENTS

Skills: Training in Intimidate, Stealth, or Streetwise

Minor Quest: You must successfully interrogate a prisoner, infiltrate an evil cult, or uncover an evil organization before the Shades of Darkness organization accepts you.

Shades of Darkness Benefits

Anyone affiliated with the Shades of Darkness is given accommodations in the Theater of Sighs when in Gloomwrought and access to its training facilities and library. The organization also keeps ritual casters on hand to perform Disenchant Magic Item, Phantom Seed, Planar Portal, Raise Dead, and other rituals at the DM's discretion.

Heroic Tier: You can requisition one *potion of aptitude* (level 5) each level.

Paragon Tier: You can requisition one scroll of the Shadow Walk ritual each level.

Epic Tier: If you die while on a mission and your body is returned to the Theater of Sighs, members of the Shades of Darkness perform the Raise Dead ritual at no cost to you.

Playing a Shade

Those running the Shades of Darkness have few demands on their servants. Most missions involve matters concerning the Shadowfell, and the Conclave expects and receives obedience from its members. When not on official business, the organization does not interfere with their agents' free time.

Missions

Preserving the Shadowfell from exploitation by foreign powers is the foremost concern for the Shades of Darkness, and most missions involve combating those forces threatening to disrupt the plane's balance. Typical missions might involve information gathering, infiltration, and assassination. When the Conclave dispatches orders to an agent, it sends the message by way of shadows. A semitransparent humanoid form made from solid darkness reveals the mission parameters, answers relevant questions, and then melts away until nothing remains.

Advancement

The Shades of Darkness has a simple hierarchy, with agents at the bottom, intermediaries in the middle, and the Conclave at the top. Most members remain agents, regardless of actual level, because to become an intermediary requires extensive sacrifice on the organization's behalf as well as favor from the Conclave. For those seeking a post in the Conclave, they must somehow prove their worth to Mourne himself (if he exists still) or be invited by the Conclave. What criteria they use for selection is unknown by even the intermediaries.

Haunting Shade

"I am the knife in the darkness, the doom in your shadow, and the death at your vision's edge."

Those agents who impress the Conclave early are invited back to the Theater of Sighs for advanced training. Those who agree earn a face to face meeting with the Conclave and, after extensive interviews, are invited to forge a more permanent pact with their master, Mourne. The process is arduous and frightening since it sees the individual surrender that which is most precious for deeper insights into shadow magic—his or her soul. Survival is not guaranteed, but the ones who live emerge changed, their features drawn and pale, eyes dark, and their forms stalked by flickering, ominous shadows.

Haunting Shade [Multiclass]

Prerequisite: Trained in Stealth

Benefit: Your origin changes to shadow if it isn't already, so you are considered a shadow creature for all effects related to creature origin.

You gain a +2 feat bonus to Stealth checks and darkvision out to 5 squares.

Reading a Power: Level Swap

This entry tells you how a power changes if you swap a power of the indicated level or higher for it. You cannot have a power of the same name at two different levels.

Haunting Shade Novice

Prerequisite: 4th level, Haunting Shade feat

Benefit: You can swap one 3rd-level or higher encounter attack power you know for the *black blade of despair* power.

Black Blade of Despair — Haunting Shade Attack 3

Your weapon blurs, becoming a thing of smoke and darkness. Where it falls, death surely follows.

Encounter ✦ Cold, Necrotic, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a heavy blade or light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity or Charisma vs. Reflex
Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity or Charisma modifier damage plus 1d6 cold and necrotic damage, and you become insubstantial until the end of your next turn.
Level 13 Swap: 3d6 cold and necrotic damage.
Level 23 Swap: 5d6 cold and necrotic damage.

Haunting Shade Expert

Prerequisite: 8th level, Haunting Shade feat

Benefit: You can swap one 6th-level or higher utility power you know for the *shade stride* power.

Shade Stride — Haunting Shade Attack 6

You melt into the gloom and reappear some distance away from where you were.

Encounter ✦ Shadow, Teleportation
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You teleport 10 squares to any square containing dim light or darkness.

Haunting Shade Specialist

Prerequisite: 10th level, Haunting Shade feat

Benefit: You can swap one 9th-level or higher daily attack power you know for the *gathering of shadows* power.

Gathering of Shadows — Haunting Shade Attack 9

Darkness crawls across the ground, piercing your foes with shadow duplicates of your weapon and leaving them reeling in pain before the darkness wraps around you.

Daily ✦ Cold, Necrotic, Shadow, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Dexterity or Charisma vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity or Charisma modifier cold and necrotic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Effect: You become invisible until the end of your next turn and can shift 1 square. Until the end of the encounter, dim light grants you total concealment instead of normal concealment.
Level 19 Swap: 2[W] + Dexterity or Charisma modifier cold and necrotic damage.
Level 29 Swap: 3[W] + Dexterity or Charisma modifier cold and necrotic damage.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer. You'll find his most recent work in the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, *Monster Manual® 3*, and the *Player's Handbook® 3*. Rob dedicates this article to Bobby Turman, who lost Mourne to kobolds in *Dragon Mountain* many years ago.

Know Your Role: Defender

By James Auwaerter
Illustration by Jeff Himmelman

The sun shone brightly over the plains, a sharp contrast to Jaem's dark mood as he strode forward. The halflings of the tribe knew enough to stay out of his way while he looked through the markers. They weren't grave markers—the halflings cremated their dead to avoid having them raised as undead to feed their enemies' armies—but several cenotaphs lay outside the main camp, honoring those who died well.

"No such thing," Jaem growled to himself as he bent down to read one that was the right age. Most of the words were foreign, but the name was the one he sought. Kithri had died because he had failed to protect her. True, he held off one of the foulspawn that was trying to attack her, but another had slipped by him. That no one blamed him for it made things worse, not better. He fell down to his knees, and he couldn't hold back his tears.

"It should have been me."

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By and large, adventurers do not dwell on the possibility of failure. In most professions, failure can be a small thing, and the worst consequences are not typically immediately life-threatening. A farmer might face a harsh winter, or a merchant might lose all his or her coin, but they still have a chance to rebuild their fortunes. Adventurers seek out situations where they put their lives directly on the line, with odds that weigh heavily against them. If they consider failure too long, they could lose their nerve.

Even if they don't think about it much, adventurers do fail, and success can come at a cost. One of the party might fall, as might a mentor, friend, or family member. The latter can strike more powerfully for adventurers who have seemingly become inured to death. Although the souls of most adventurers are willing to return to life through a Raise Dead ritual, the same is not true for many others. Most souls resist the strident call of life, and most common folk remain in the Raven Queen's domain after they die.

Anyone who is reminded of the cost of adventuring can grow despondent, but defenders are more likely than those of other roles to suffer from survivor's guilt. Although leaders also can feel a share of responsibility in such circumstances, leaders are frequently a step removed from the front line. A defender is in the thick of the fight and can see any enemies that make their way past. Their strength in battle is the ability to draw enemy attacks upon themselves, and they can take it personally when the enemies overwhelm others before the defenders themselves are overwhelmed.

Some defenders who outlive their charges become poorer at protecting others. They give up and try to take on another role entirely, one which doesn't risk emotional involvement when they don't do their best. It takes another tragedy (or if the defender is lucky, a close call) to lead them to return to their original role.

Also, defenders can become so obsessed with not losing another party member that they expose themselves to unnecessary risks to protect others from the least bit of damage. This counterproductive behavior exposes the party to more danger indirectly, since the defenders burn through their healing surges quickly and can be nearly dead while the rest of the party remains relatively uninjured. Those defenders eventually realize that a dead defender can't defend anyone, unless they are killed first.

Religion is an answer for some defenders' guilt. They try to bargain with the gods, seeking assurances that the future will not bring more deaths to their friends, and that they're in a better place now. Paradoxically, if the defender already had been religious, this justification is less satisfying. They already had a good relationship with a god. They can't make bargains that they'll act better and then expect to see their blessings increase.

Others, especially those who had a party leader die, take on a little more of the leader role. Although they still act as defenders, they try to find more ways to make the rest of the party stronger. Multiclassing into a leader class typically provides these defenders with some emergency healing. This behavior is seen more commonly with defenders whose defenses are so high that their enemies still find it easier to attack their allies than face the defender head-on.

Well-adjusted defenders learn from their sorrow. They know that they're not invincible or untouchable, and they take actions to become better guardians. That can take many forms, from developing better tactics to protect vulnerable members of the party to using magic equipment that makes it harder for enemies to disengage from the defender. Some accept that they can't protect everyone, but the best defenders don't give up reaching toward that ideal.

Paladin Prayer

Gift of Resistance — **Paladin Utility 22**

You project an aura around yourself that shields your allies from damage just as it shields you.

Daily ✦ Divine, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You enter the gift of resistance stance. Until the stance ends, each ally within 5 squares of you has resistance 20 to any of the same damage types to which you have resistance. However, your enemies' attacks ignore all your resistances while you are in this stance.

Epic Tier Feats

The following feats are available to a character of 21st level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Inspirational Survival

Prerequisite: 21st level, warden

Benefit: When you succeed on a saving throw to end an effect, each ally within 5 squares of you gains a +2 feat bonus to saving throws until the start of your next turn.

Prescient Retaliation

Prerequisite: 21st level, battlemind, *mind spike* power

Benefit: You can use *mind spike* as an immediate interrupt instead of an immediate reaction.

Rapid Aegis Reaction

Prerequisite: 21st level, swordmage, *aegis of assault* or *aegis of ensnarement* or *aegis of shielding* power

Benefit: The first time you use the immediate action granted by your Swordmage Aegis each round, it does not count toward the normal limit on the number of immediate actions you can take in one round. You still cannot use this immediate action more than once per triggering event.

Rapid Combat Challenge

Prerequisite: 21st level, fighter, Combat Challenge class feature

Benefit: The first time you use the immediate interrupt granted by your Combat Challenge feature each round, it does not count toward the normal limit on the number of immediate actions you can take in one round. You still cannot use this immediate action more than once per triggering event.

Rapid Mind Spike

Prerequisite: 21st level, battlemind, *mind spike* power

Benefit: The first time you use the *mind spike* power each round, it does not count toward the normal limit on the number of immediate actions you can take in one round. You still cannot use this immediate action more than once per triggering event.

Rapid Wild Defense

Prerequisite: 21st level, warden, *warden's fury* or *warden's grasp* power

Benefit: The first time you use either *warden's fury* or *warden's grasp* each round, it does not count toward the normal limit on the number of immediate actions you can take in one round. You still cannot use this immediate action more than once per triggering event.

Surprise Mark

Prerequisite: 21st level, any defender class

Benefit: When you roll initiative and are not surprised, you can mark one enemy you can see within 10 squares of you. This mark lasts until you make an attack or until the end of your next turn.

Strength Through Challenge

Prerequisite: 21st level, any defender class

Benefit: You gain resist 5 all while you have two or more enemies marked.

Swordmage Implement Expertise

Prerequisite: 21st level, Int 21; Str 17 or Con 17; Swordmage

Benefit: When attacking with a swordmage implement, you score a critical hit on a roll of 19–20 with melee basic attacks, swordmage attack powers, and swordmage paragon path attack powers.

Epic Destiny: Ceaseless Guardian

Triumph can turn to tragedy in an instant. You aren't going to let that instant come to pass.

Prerequisite: Any defender class

You failed to protect someone in your care. It might have been a friend, a family member, or a former member of your adventuring party, but you feel responsible for that loss. In return, you've rededicated yourself to the ideal of the defender—a protector of friends and a fierce obstacle to foes—but with a specific focus. All enemies will learn that the only way to defeat your allies is by going through you first, and your abilities lend you an alacrity many cannot match.

To succeed at being the first line of defense, you have trained to take advantage of every opening that your enemies leave you as quickly as possible. To those around you, you move twice as fast as any other defender to blunt your foes' attacks. You see it as a natural progression that anyone of enough skill could attain, though your desire to not see anyone else lost drives you beyond the point of mere humans.

As you grow in skill, your ability to react to enemies quickly continues to grow. An attempted ambush turns into a disaster for your foes as you move in before they are ready. When you reach the apex of your power, your oath to never allow an ally to fall before you can finally be fulfilled. You can channel your strength into those whom you have sworn to protect, keeping them standing long after your enemies would otherwise have overwhelmed them.

Immortality

You stopped fearing your own death a long time ago. In doing so, you have denied death's power over you. Although you can die, it seems that you are raised again by a member of your adventuring party, someone seeking the ideal bodyguard, or a god. You might be recruited to fight alongside a Legendary General in one of the wars that span the planes. You might join with a World Tree Guardian who understands your devotion to your allies, or with an Undying Warrior whom you can trust to remain safe on his or her own. Very rarely, you find a small place of the world to which to retire for a time, but the call to protect others eventually leads you back into battle again.

Ceaseless Guardian Features

Guardian Mindfulness (21st level): You gain +2 to an ability score of your choice, and your speed increases by 1.

Irrepressible Defense (24th level): You can take immediate actions and opportunity actions even when you are dazed or stunned.

Never Again (30th level): You gain the *never again* at-will power.

Never Again — Ceaseless Guardian Feature

You refuse to let any of your allies fall under your watch.

At-Will ✦ Healing
No Action — **Close** burst 5
Requirement: You must have at least one healing surge.
Trigger: You or an ally in the burst dies
Target: The triggering creature
Effect: You spend one or two healing surges but do not regain hit points for spending these healing surges. The target does not die, and the target regains hit points equal to his or her surge value for each healing surge you spent as a part of this power.

Ceaseless Guardian Powers

Always Ready — Ceaseless Guardian Utility 26

When an enemy tries to ambush your party, you show it the depth of its folly.

Daily
No Action ✦ Personal
Trigger: You roll initiative
Effect: Your initiative score is equal to one greater than the highest initiative check among all your allies within 10 squares of you. You are not surprised, and if a surprise round occurs, you can take a standard action, move action, and minor action during the surprise round.

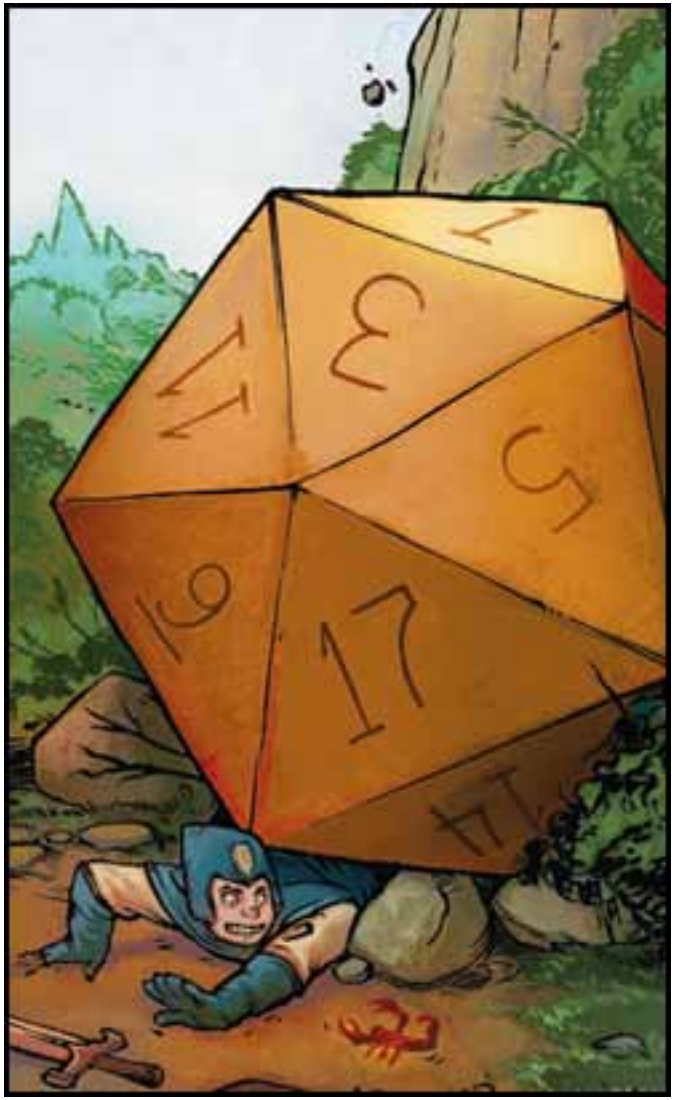
About the Author

Jim Auwaerter hails from a small village off the coast of the Lugotak Sea, far to the north of the Moonsea. Please feel free to give feedback to him on the Wizards Community forums or at www.loremaster.org. Follow Jim online at www.twitter.com/heridfel.

by Bill Slavicsek

Just like the White Rabbit ...
... Who is Sometimes Very, Very Late

I'm late! I'm late! Sorry about that. Things have been hectic and extremely busy around here, so it took me a little bit longer to get around to writing this month's column. Instead of teasing you with the various things I've been busy with these past few weeks that I can't really talk about yet, let's get right to the stuff I can fill you in on. This month, in addition to regaling you with our newest product releases, I want to tell you about the *Castle Ravenloft* board game that I just got my hands on, and then I want to give you a sneak peek at the upcoming *Dark Sun Creature Catalog* in case you want to throw a new monster or two into your next game session. I'm sure I'll let something else interesting slip through as the column unfolds. Let's get to it!



New Releases For May

For the Dungeons & Dragons players out there (I'm sure there's more than a few of you), we have a trio of new roleplaying game products hitting the stores this month. Dungeon Masters in search of a new adventure or two need to check out *The Slaying Stone*, an adventure designed for 1st-level characters. It concerns deadly relics from ancient wars and the evil forces searching for them. For even more variety, the *Dungeon Magazine Annual* features five adventures chosen from the best that *D&D Insider* has to offer. For players, the *Player's Strategy Guide* provides tips and tricks for optimizing your character. This book is a great read, and it uses a distinctive art style throughout that makes you want to check every page before you dive in and start reading the essays and sidebars.

Also, check out the novels tab to see what's new in D&D fiction this month, including the new *Monster Slayers* D&D book for young readers.

Oh, and here's a friendly reminder. Our Huge Orcus figure comes out in June. You're going to want to reserve one of these magnificent specimens early, because quantities will be extremely limited.

Creature Competition

In case you haven't been following our creature competition, take a look at it here. We're getting down to the final four, but it's not too late to vote for your favorite monster! One of the top four monsters in the competition will make an appearance in the D&D Encounters program later this year. If you don't know what D&D Encounters is, then you haven't been paying attention to my previous columns. Go check it out right now!

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Castle Ravenloft Board Game

Mike Mearls, Peter Lee, and I are the proud game designers of the upcoming Adventure System line of D&D board games, and we just got an advanced copy here in the office. *Castle Ravenloft*, a cooperative-style dungeon crawling game for one to five players, hits the shelves in August. Check out the picture to see all the cool stuff we were able to fit into the box. Each time you play, the game is different, and a single adventure can be played in about an hour. A second game, *Wrath of Ashardalon*, debuts in November. That one features adventures built around a Huge Red Dragon. Even better, the two games can be combined for extended play. Sigh. I need to give the advanced copy back to the production people now. But in just a few short months, we can all have our own copies of the game.

Things That Go Bump in the Desert

Dark Sun. This campaign setting has been near and dear to my heart since I first checked out the original boxed set and started writing for the line back in 1991. This summer, we're bringing the setting back with a new *Campaign Guide*, *Creature Catalog*, and adventure. For those of you who haven't heard about it, *Dark Sun* is set on the desert world of Athas, a fantastic world that has been ravaged by magic and turned into a desolate and deadly wasteland. This month, I'm showing off a few monsters from the *Creature Catalog*. Next month, we'll examine something out of the *Campaign Guide*.

ANAKORE

Sweltering desert travelers who curse the blazing sun overhead might breathe a sigh of relief when the crimson orb sets, but their solace proves short-lived as the shapes sliding beneath the dunes reveal themselves. When the sun dies away, the primitive, simple-minded anakores burst from the sands, eager to seize the prey they have stealthily tracked during the daylight hours.

Lore

Dungeoneering DC 19: Anakores live beneath loose dunes of dust or sand. They can sense vibrations of prey passing on the surface, and some anakores can smell blood spilled on the earth above. Only ravenous anakores attack prey during the day. Instead, they lurk beneath the sands and track promising game until sunset.

These nomadic creatures follow prey from place to place, seldom lairing in one location for long. They travel and hunt in small packs, and the most successful stalker among them is their leader. Anakores usually bring down as many kills as they can before retreating to feast. Each member of the pack has a role in the attack. Dune kings burst from the sand with great force, leading the attack and unsettling the terrain to provide the anakores with an advantage. Renders tear into the quarry savagely, weakening them before the kill. Hunters separate individual victims from the group, dragging them below the sand one by one.

While on the move, anakores subsist on roots, including poisonous specimens that aid in the production of the anakore paralytic. A telltale sign of recent anakore movement is an area filled with fallen, rootless plants. Occasionally, a particularly cunning dune king disposes of the foliage so as not to give away the pack's presence, but this level of craftiness is rare.

Little is known about the origins of the anakores. According to an ancient tale, terrors from beyond the sky touched the humanoids that were forebears of the creatures. Afterward, these ancestors recoiled from the burning sun and burrowed below the wastes to find cool, embracing darkness. Beneath the sands, the creatures dreamed dark reveries and became nightmares of the desert.

No discernible characteristics distinguish anakores as male or female. It is whispered that the creatures produce no young, instead dragging selected victims to weird hollows under the sands. Inside these wombs, the captives become new anakores rather than meals. How and why the anakores choose particular individuals as their new kin is unknown.

Encounters

Anakores avoid battle on terrain in which they cannot burrow. They appear with others of their kind or with other burrowing creatures, such as bulettes, hejkins, galeb duhrs, and kruthiks. Wasteland raiders convince groups of anakores to work for them by paying the creatures with food and shiny baubles. Dreams and visions also entice anakores to explore ancient ruins where other aberrant creatures dwell, some of which are stronger and more clever than even the dune kings. In such places, anakores serve these creatures and join in their incomprehensible rites.

Anakore Hunter

The shuddering dunes might herald more than wind. Anakore hunters burrow beneath the loose earth, alert to prey that they can surprise and drag under the surface. The hunters leave their pray there to suffocate while they focus on dragging down other quarry.

Anakore Hunter	**Level 5 Lurker**
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 200
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24	**Initiative** +9
AC 19, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16	**Perception** +9
Speed 5 (earth walk), burrow 6 (loose earth only)	Low-light vision tremorsense 5
Traits	
Dune Driver	
The hunter can charge while burrowing.	
Sensitive to Light	
When the hunter is exposed to direct sunlight or takes radiant damage, it takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
Claw ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and the hunter grabs the target.	
Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the hunter); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).	
Drag Under ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one immobilized creature or creature grabbed by the hunter); +8 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is removed from play (save ends both). When this effect ends, the target reappears in the space it last occupied or in the nearest unoccupied space of its choice.	
Aftereffect: The target is immobilized (save ends).	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+4)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 6 (+0)	
Alignment evil; **Languages** Deep Speech	

Anakore Render

Sliding from the sand with a grace that belies its bulk, an anakore render sets upon wounded and weak prey. The bloodthirsty predator serves as the center of a coordinated ambush by a pack of anakores, making foes more vulnerable to attacks from its allies.

Anakore Render	**Level 7 Brute**
Medium aberrant humanoid	XP 300
HP 96; **Bloodied** 48	**Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 19	**Perception** +12
Speed 7 (earth walk), burrow 6 (loose earth only)	Low-light vision tremorsense 5
Traits	
Dune Diver	
The render can charge while burrowing.	
Sensitive to Light	
When the render is exposed to direct sunlight or takes radiant damage, it takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
Claw ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 6 damage, and the render pushes the target 2 squares and knocks it prone.	
Blood Frenzy ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅	
Effect: The render uses *claw* twice against a bloodied or prone creature.	
Move Actions	
Blood Hunger ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The hunter shifts 3 squares to a square that must be closer to a bloodied creature.	
Minor Actions	
Rending Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one bloodied or prone creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 +5 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the render's next turn. If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).	
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 20 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 18 (+7)	
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 7 (+1) **Cha** 7 (+1)	
Alignment evil; **Languages** Deep Speech	

Nibenay

For twenty centuries, the Shadow King trusted the temple bureaucracy to see to his kingdom's affairs as he luxuriated in his arcane studies. But the death of King Kalak in Tyr has dislodged Nibenay from his comfortably oblivious state, and the nobles and templars of the city-state are scrambling to cover a plethora of sins and slights from his renewed attention.

Nibenay, Sorcerer-King **Level 29 Elite Controller**
Large natural humanoid XP 30,000

HP 532; **Bloodied** 266 **Initiative** +19
AC 43, **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 42 **Perception** +25
Speed 6, teleport 6 Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Actions Points** 1

Traits

Sorcerer-King's Guile
Nibenay doesn't provoke opportunity attacks for making ranged or area attacks.

Standard Actions

Dragon's Talon ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +34 vs. AC
Hit: 6d10 +4 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).

Ego Whip (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +33 vs. Will
Hit: 4d12 + 11 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Ego Storm ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Nibenay uses ego whip twice.

Defiling Burst (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Effect: Each enemy adjacent to Nibenay takes 15 necrotic damage.
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in burst); +31 vs. Fortitude. Nibenay gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls for each enemy damaged by this power's effect.
Hit: 4d10 + 15 necrotic damage.

Minor Actions

Zone of Shadows (zone) ✦ **Recharge** when this power's zone ends
Effect: Nibenay creates a zone in a close burst 1 that lasts until the end of Nibenay's next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures except Nibenay. Enemies are blinded while within the zone.

Triggered Actions

Arcane Defiling (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: Nibenay hits and deals damage to an enemy with *dragon's talon* or *ego whip*.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy within 2 squares of Nibenay takes 10 necrotic damage, and the triggering enemy is weakened until the end of Nibenay's next turn.

Nibenay's Demand (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: Nibenay is subject to an effect that a save can end.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): One enemy within 5 squares of Nibenay takes 10 necrotic damage, and Nibenay makes a saving throw against the triggerint effect.

Skills Arcana +28, Insight +25, Intimidate +29

Str 18 (+18)	**Dex** 20 (+19)	**Wis** 23 (+20)
Con 26 (+22)	**Int** 28 (+23)	**Cha** 30 (+24)

Alignment evil; **Languages** Common

Lore

History DC 33: For ages, Nibenay spent his days in isolation, researching and performing rituals to increase his knowledge and power. Recently, however, the slaying of King Kalak of Tyr has reawakened the ruler in him. In the past several weeks, he has called several councils, deposed dozens of templar-wives, and begun to monitor his armed forces and noble houses. His scrutiny has sent terror through the ranks of Nibenese power wielders, none of whom abstained from dark dealings to gain their positions.

Nibenay has not completely abandoned his studies, though. He is rumored to be exploring Athas's distant past. Speculators believe he might be looking for a way to bring about a new age.

Encounters

High consorts are Nibenay's surest allies, as are the Shadow King's personal arcane assistants. They alone know that Nibenay is not the handsome, regal human the rest of the world sees. Rather, he has taken on a draconic aspect, which he adopts for important meetings. Nibenay's inner circle also includes his half-monster son, Dhojakt, as well as an elite band of goliath warriors.

Nibenay

Nibenay prefers to sequester himself in the Nagga-ramakam, the royal compound where he studies the mysteries of the worlds. He emerges only to lead his army to war or to crush internal rebellions.

Nibenay in Combat

Exceptionally cranky when forced to put aside his studies, Nibenay radiates his displeasure. An enemy that draws too near the Shadow King suffers a barrage of defiling power. Meanwhile, Nibenay verbally shreds an interloper too fearful to approach, psychically lashing it for its meek manner in battle. Then, he teleports to its side and stabs it. A little blood on the hands is good for the soul.

SHADOW BRIDE

Nobles and powerful templars snub Nibenay's lowest-ranking templar-wives, calling them "shadow brides" and mocking their barren beds and trivial stations in the kingdom's governance. Shadow brides frequently become pawns in the city-state's vast and intricate political dance. Newly initiated brides can be susceptible to bribery, and the craftier templar-wives work multiple sides of a conflict to scheme their way into the city-state's higher echelons.

SHADOW BRIDES IN COMBAT

A shadow bride is a scrappy fighter and doesn't mind getting her hands dirty. In fact, she prefers it. She unleashes her built-up rage for those noble snakes who condescend to her on any who dare assault her. She reserves her psychic punishments for beautifully dressed or well-spoken adversaries.

Shadow Bride **Level 13 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 800

HP 130; **Bloodied** 65 **Initiative** +14
AC 29, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25 **Perception** +15
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Obsidian Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 4d6 +7 damage.

Shadow Bolt (cold, implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +16 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 9 cold and necrotic damage.

Demand Penitence (implement, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close burst 5 (one or two creatures in burst marked by the shadow bride); +16 vs. Will *Hit:* 4d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the bride pulls the target 4 squares and knocks the target prone.

Minor Actions

Curse of the Shadow King ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: A creature adjacent to the bride is marked. The marked creature grants combat advantage until the end of the bride's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Nibenay's Retribution (fire, necrotic, teleportation, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy mrked by the bride and within 6 squares of her makes an attack that does not include the bride as a target.
Effect: The bride teleports to a square adjacent to the triggering enemy.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +18 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 +3 fire and necrotic damage.

Skills Arcana +13

Str 14 (+8)	**Dex** 23 (+12)	**Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 14 (+8)	**Cha** 16 (+9)

Alignment evil; **Languages** Common
Equipment obsidian short sword, rod, robes

In Case You Don't Know Him

Bill Slavicsek's gaming life was forever changed when he discovered Dungeons & Dragons in 1976. He became a gaming professional in 1986 when he was hired by West End Games as an editor. He quickly added developer, designer, and creative manager to his resume, and his work helped shape the *Paranoia*, *Ghostbusters*, *Star Wars*, and *Torg* roleplaying games. He even found some time during that period to do freelance work for D&D 1st Edition. In 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc. as a designer/editor. He worked on a bunch of 2nd Edition material, including products for Core D&D, *Dark Sun*, *Ravenloft*, and *Planescape*. In 1997, he was part of the TSR crowd that moved to Seattle to join Wizards of the Coast, and in that year he was promoted to R&D Director for D&D. In that position, Bill oversaw the creation of both the 3rd Edition and 4th Edition of the D&D Roleplaying Game. He was one of the driving forces behind the *D&D Insider* project, and he continues to oversee and lead the creative strategy and effort for Dungeons & Dragons.

Bill's enormous list of credits includes *Alternity*, *d20 Modern*, *d20 Star Wars*, *Pokemon Jr.*, *Eberron Campaign Setting*, the *D&D For Dummies* books, and his monthly *Ampersand (&)* column for *Dragon* Magazine.

Until next time,
Keep On Playing!

An Overwhelmed Duckling, Part 2

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE
illustrations by William O'Conner and Patrick Thomas Parnell

I can take a hint. Receiving a copy of *The Player's Strategy Guide* with a post-it note inscription that said, "Read this or no one will play D&D with you ever again" is pretty obvious, right? But then I found a copy of *Player's Handbook Races: Tieflings* on my desk and now I'm getting paranoid.

"Real funny, people!" I shouted over the cube walls. "What's next? How to Host a Dinner Party? How to min-max your DVR? How to Stand Up to Your Cat?" Actually, I could probably benefit from that last one.

"It's like how you were that one time in Bloomingdale's," my mom said later that night when I explained why I was studying the *Player's Strategy Guide* instead of watching the latest episode of The Real Housewives of New York. (Don't judge. We all have skeletons in our DVRs.)

"I have no idea what you mean, Mom, but I'm pretty sure that's the first time anyone has compared playing D&D with shopping at Bloomingdale's."

"Don't you remember?" she went on. "We took you and your brother to Florida for spring break when you guys were in high school and Dad put a $100 gift card in your Easter Basket. You were so overwhelmed by what to buy you never spent it."

Ah yes, one of my greatest regrets. I've clearly leveled up my shopping skills since then. We didn't have a Bloomingdale's in Upstate New York where I lived, so it was literally a "use it or lose it" experience. I caved under the pressure.

"That's really cool of you to bring this up days before my first game as a born- again D&D player."

"If memory serves, I found you breathing into a little brown bag in a dressing room in the maternity section," Mom said. "Why were you in the maternity section, anyway?

"Those pants were ridiculously comfortable."

"But once again Mommy saved the day," she sighed. "You begged me to buy that card from you so you wouldn't go home with nothing. And I did."

"Right," I said. "For $.75 on the dollar."

"I was teaching you an important lesson."

I'm not sure what lesson I should have learned by my mom ripping me off, but she's right about the comparison. The $100 gift card is *burning hands* and Bloomingdale's is The Chaos Scar. I'll never reach adventuring excellence by overthinking things. There's only one thing to do.

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"Mommy, help me again," I said, looking for a little brown bag to breath into. "I need a recipe for the best cake you've ever had."

I get a chance to practice what the *Player's Strategy Guide* preached during my Wednesday D&D Encounters game. Granted my Encounters character, Herteus Maximus, tiefling psion, was just starting out his adventuring career, but like learning a foreign language, you need to start them out when they're young.

The Wednesday group is small and comprised of casual D&D'ers who probably wouldn't notice if Herteus performed a History check instead of an Arcana check and certainly wouldn't hold it against him if they did. It's the perfect training ground for fledgling tieflings.

Not that I want to put poor Herteus at risk, but I fear he suffers from the same fate many of us "second, third, and beyond" children endured. Aren't parents just a bit more lax after the first one? A sniffle doesn't require a trip to the ER. A tumble off a tricycle doesn't require traction. And a first word, first tooth, or first crit doesn't warrant a scrapbook, apparently (ahem, Mom). I didn't even bring cookies from the vending machine to this game.

As the encounter begins, we're hot on the heels of Xeres who has kidnapped our benefactor, Fayne—our supposed patron who is starting to remind me an awful lot of my old nemesis Lady Elaydrn. We were standing at the threshold of a dimly lit room where we suspected they were headed. Chris, our DM, asked us what we wanted to do.

"An Arcana check!" I shouted. Oh yeah! Check out the big, magically gifted brain on Herteus.

"He needs to be in the room if he wants to do that," Chris reminded me.

"Fine," I said, moving my mini. "He's going in!"

"Stop right there!" Chris commanded.

Uh, oh. It's never a good thing when your DM interrupts your move.

"When Herteus gets to here," Chris said, pointing to the square I just passed through, "a large green blob falls from the ceiling and tries to attack."

Hmm, didn't I just approve some banner ads that mentioned something about wearing protective headgear?

The blob missed Herteus but it, along with several mushroomlike creatures, are clearly disturbed by us disrupting their mojo.

"The myconid gas spores move to here and here," Chris said. Coincidentally here and here were on either side of Herteus.

"Help!" I yelled. "I'm flanked by fungi!" This is what thinking strategically gets you?

"15 damage for Herteus."

Chris is always calm and soft-spoken, which would come in handy if you were trapped in an elevator or needed help inflating your airline-issued flotation device. But when he bloodies your 1st-level character with one attack? That calls for a little bit of inflection.

"Aren't all your powers ranged?" our cleric asked.

"So?"

"So why'd you charge into the room? Let the monk burst into the room next time."

"Thanks for the advice," I said, wondering if across the table counted as ranged.

Admittedly this wasn't starting off as my finest hour. Herteus was dangerously close to getting pinned in the corner by the spores.

"You could risk an attack of opportunity from these guys and run," Chris offered. DM's always suggest things like that.

Calling upon my knowledge of the PSG, I realized it was the best option. Fat lot of good Herteus would do in the corner. And could I really show my face here again if he was brought down by a couple of mushrooms?

He made it unscathed, even managed to bring the hurt to one of the myconid guards with *mind thrust*. Oddly enough, the guard didn't take that well and attacked Herteus as retribution.

"That's 16 damage," Chris said in his "in case of emergency" voice.

"He's down!" I said in my annoying, frantic voice.

And he failed his first two death saves.

"Oh, no," I croaked over the lump in my throat. "He hasn't even had his first haircut yet!"

"Don't worry," Laura said. "You'll find love again." She pointed to the stack of pre-gens on the table.

Thanks to a little help from our pulverized cleric, that wouldn't be necessary. Herteus regained consciousness, and I wasn't going to take this second wind for granted.

"Alright, let's think about this," I said, channeling the PSG. The monk was engulfed in slime, the cleric was way more than bloodied, and the sorcerer still hadn't made it into the room thanks to the tag team bouncers Shroom 1 and Shroom 2. We couldn't go after the gas spores because hitting them unleashed a poison we were all susceptible to. Damaging the slime would also cause our monk damage and seeing as though she was already bloodied, no one wanted to take that chance. Herteus set his sights on the guard closest to him and used his power points to augment *memory hole*.

"14 against will?" I asked.

"That'll just miss," Chris said. "Sorry."

Figures. But then I remembered something.

"Wait! This is the same guy who hit me. I can use *infernal wrath*. That's 15."

"That hits," Chris said.

With the +3 *infernal wrath* grants, it's enough to at least bloody the guard, and thanks to the augmented *memory hole*, Herteus was now invisible to the guard.

Figuring the guard couldn't see him, Herteus didn't need to move on his next turn and instead used his minor action to cast *distract* on the green slime.

"He's riffing off some 'your mama' jokes, which really pisses off green slime," I said. Everyone knows green slimes are mama's boys.

Whatever distraction Herteus caused was enough to grant combat advantage to our monk, who was still battling inside the belly of the beast. She did a little drunken monkey action and managed to save out of the engulfment.

"Yeah!" we all cheered.

With her back in the fight and the sorcerer finally joining the fray, it was almost a fair fight, and we survived. (I later found out Chris never activated the myconid rotpriests because "it would have been like watching crickets taking on a pack of alligators.") We left the encounter much worse for wear, with two new healing potions and an overall feeling of satisfaction. To anyone who didn't know better, they might think I knew what I was doing. Almost.

Buoyed by the successful outcome of Fungi Fest 2010, I was ready for the Wyld Stallyns. I arrived at our conference room so early there was a meeting still in progress. Fortunately, it was just R&D and they're used to me barging in on their meetings.

"Don't mind me!" I shouted, setting up my dice, character sheet, *Player's Handbook 1*, *2*, and *3*, and—most importantly—gooey butter cake. (Thanks, Paula Deen.)

By the time New DM arrived with his props, I knew Tabby's spells and powers like the back of her robe. I even took Tabby shopping for things like healing potions and an adventurer's kit.

Marty was the next to arrive, and he gave me a confused half smirk as he took his seat next to me. He rammed his chair into mine while lunging for the cake and sent my Jenga-inspired dice tower crashing down.

"I could use *wizard's escape* right now and teleport 5 squares to a space not adjacent to an enemy," I said. "Did you know I could do that?"

"I knew Tabitha could do that," Marty said.

Whatever. The only thing that differentiates Marty from a *D&D Compendium* is an expensive haircut and an argyle sweater.

"What's with the cake?" Hilary asked as she took her seat.

"It's Tabby's birthday. Sort of."

We began the day's adventure by stumbling through a trap door that led to a rectory complete with a battered bearskin rug, upended tables and chairs, and the stench of century-old corpses.

"I think I rented this place for my friend's bachelorette party," I said.

"It smells like death," New DM continued, "which is no surprise as you notice heaps of half-devoured bodies covered in dried gore,"

"I hope you got your security deposit back," Marty said.

"Oh yeah," New DM continued, "there's another corpse by the altar whose robes bear the dire skull symbol of Orcus. Around his neck hangs a large, black gem that begins to glow with a purple light."

Purple light. Glowing orb. This has Arcana check all over it.

"Tabby knows what that is!" I shouted. I rolled a 2. "15?"

"Tabitha thinks this stone might be amethyst," New DM says. "Maybe rose quartz. Real good for preventing intoxication and looks nice with jewel tones and Bermuda shorts."

"What? Tabby would never say that," I argued. Not only did I fail my Arcana check, but Tabitha failed her fashion check. *Bermuda shorts*?

Fortunately the rest of the group appeared to be experts on glowing orbs. They deduced that the necklace had the power to animate all of the corpses in the rectory, it's stronger at night, and was mostly likely heightened by the lingering energy in the temple. Tabitha basically has a master's in glowing orbs and couldn't figure that out?

I didn't have much time to dwell, because the corpses animated and immediately attacked Anwar and Holden, who were standing closest to them.

Unfortunately, Tabitha was standing closest to the altar, so the amethyst-wearing deathlock wight set his sights on her. He fired off a *grave bolt* that missed Tabby by mere inches.

Unwilling to test her luck twice, Tabby moved to what appeared to be a safe zone, but clearly I can't tell the difference between a column and a staircase.

"Is that where Tabby is going to stand?" New DM asked.

Usually when New DM asks you if that's what you really want to do, it's either because you foiled his plan or you're about to do something really stupid.

"Yes," I answered, refusing to be intimidated.

"Then Tabby just fell down the stairs," New DM declared.

"Don't mind us, Tabby," Marty said. "You just head on down to the community center. I'm sure they have foosball and vending machines."

"Bring me back an Orange Crush," Kierin said.

Tabby wasn't the only one in a downward spiral. I could sense my confidence was following her. New DM sensed it too, so he made an offer.

"Do an Acrobatics check to see if she managed to hold onto the railing."

I rolled a 1.

"So basically she yelled 'Geronimo!' and slid down the banister," Bart said.

"And now she's knocked prone at the base of the stairs," New DM smiled. "Sorry. I tried."

That's great. Truly awesome. A spectacular exhibit of tactical genius. My character fell down a spiral staircase and now had to spend the next two rounds trying to climb back up again. I missed an episode of The Real Housewives for this?

"Can I use my *shield*?" I asked.

When Tabitha finally rejoined the action, there were only two zombies left and both were bloodied. She stayed in the background, away from staircases, open windows, potholes, trick wire, bear traps, exploding cigars, snake nut cans, and anything else that could come between her and a *magic missile*. I even wasted *shock sphere* on only one target because I was determined not to leave this fight with any encounter powers intact. She'd burn down a bookshelf with her *flaming hands* if she had to.

When the game was over, I gathered up the cake pan, rulebooks, and crumpled character sheet. Having the athletic ability of a hedgehog, I never played sports growing up, but I'm pretty sure this is what I'd feel like if I did. Shouldn't someone offer me a Lifesaver?

"It was great," I told my mom later that night when she called to see how it went. (We were talking about the cake.)

"But I kind of played like crap," I went on. "Like, worse than usual. Do you know how hard I studied for this?"

"No one can expect you to know every rule," she said. "Aren't there millions of them?"

"But I should know the difference between a spiral staircase and a column."

"It's a game," she said. "Who do you think you are? Jack Bauer?"

"I wish."

"Besides, aren't you the one who is always mouthing off about how D&D is cooperative and you like it so much because you don't compete with each other?"

"I guess so."

"So instead of hyperventilating in a dressing room, ask questions. If they're really your friends, they'll help you."

I think The *Player's Strategy Guide* offers some good advice, but maybe my mom could add a tip or two: Ask for help when needed. Give help when asked. Don't judge.

And if all else fails, bring cake.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble was never a baby. At least not in the literal sense. And at least not according to photographic evidence. The earliest documented photo of her is when she was 3 years old after accidentally walking into the background of her brother's photo shoot.

Alumni: Monster Manual

by Bart Carroll

4th Edition's Monster Manual 3 releases next month, introducing a wealth of new creatures into the game (e.g., catastrophic dragons, apocalypse spells, new types of slaad, umber hulks, beholders) . . . but this is *D&D Alumni*, and we're much more concerned with those monsters of past editions finally making their return to the game!

And so, we give you our (admittedly subjective) Top 10 monsters returning from the 1st Edition *Monster Manual*. We wanted to look back at the origins of these creatures—with their details pulled and paraphrased from 1st and 2nd Edition *Monster Manuals*—to help explain why we're so thrilled to see their reappearance (even if that means we'll soon be fighting them at the table).

Next time, we'll continue our look back by presenting the Top 10 monsters returning from the 1st Edition *Monster Manual* 2and *Fiend Folio*. Until then, enjoy!

#10. Ghast

Let's be honest. Back in the day, it simply paid to be an elf (racial level limits notwithstanding): infravision, weapon bonuses, a laundry list of languages, resistance to *sleep* and *charm* . . . and immunity to a ghoul's paralyzing touch.

With the rest of the party immobilized, it was left to the elf to save their collective bacon. So then, how do you panic an elf (aside from simply overwhelming them with ghouls)? Embed a ghast in the encounter,

"so like ghouls as to be completely indistinguishable from them, and they are usually found only with a pack of ghouls. When the pack attacks it will quickly become evident that ghosts are present, however, for they exude a carrion stench in a 10' radius which causes retching and nausea unless a saving throw versus poison is made." Worse than their stench, however, a ghast's paralyzing touch could overcome even an elf's inherent immunity.

Ghasts were meaner, tougher, and harder to turn. You couldn't even keep them at bay with a *protection from evil* spell without adding powdered iron to the mix. Now returning in the 4E*Monster Manual* 3,

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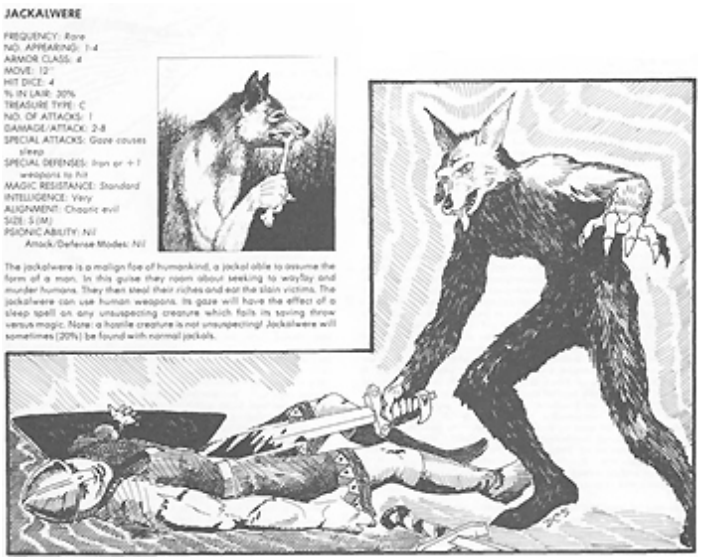
"When ghouls go too long without humanoid flesh, they rot away from the inside out. The insatiable hunger that accompanies this transformation grants ghasts a desperate strength and ferocity." Stench of death? Check. Immobilizing bite? Check. Fearlessness of elves? Absolutely—even ghouls can now affect the elven race. So good luck exploring that crypt.

#9. Jackalwere

Why was it called a jackalwere, and not a werejackel? The 1E *Monster Manual* provided a rich array of lycanthropes (werewolf being just one variety): humans with the ability to transform into animal or hybrid animal form, thanks to the curse of lycanthropy. Whereas a jackalwere undertook the opposite transformation: "a jackal able to assume the form of a man. In this guise they roam about seeking to waylay and murder humans. They then steal their riches and eat the slain victims."


JACKALWERE

FREQUENCY: Rare
NO. APPEARING: 1-4
ARMOR CLASS: 4
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 4
% IN LAIR: 30%
TREASURE TYPE: C
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Gaze causes sleep
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Iron or +1 weapons to hit
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Standard
INTELLIGENCE: Very
ALIGNMENT: Chaotic evil
SIZE: S (M)
PSIONIC ABILITY: Nil
Attack/Defense Modes: Nil

The jackalwere is a malign foe of humankind, a jackal able to assume the form of a man. In this guise they roam about seeking to waylay and murder humans. They then steal their riches and eat the slain victims. The jackalwere can use human weapons. Its gaze will have the effect of a sleep spell on any unsuspecting creature which fails its saving throw versus magic. None: a hostile creature is not unsuspecting! Jackalwere will sometimes (20%) be found with normal jackals.

Just as ghasts surrounded themselves with ghouls, so jackalweres sometimes ran with jackels. Add in their sleep-inducing gaze, and they made for a true trickster of an adversary, a "malign foe of humankind". What might have sold them most, however, was their illustration—a hybrid jackelwere laying into its fallen victim.

Lycanthropes are a steadfast component of the fantasy genre (including, we grudgingly suppose, the *Twilight Saga*), and trickster jackals have long been part of world folklore. As far as jackalweres' origins in the D&D universe, the *MM3* provides the following backstory:

"All lands were ravaged when the war between the gods and the primordials shook the world. Primal humanoid tribes were hard-pressed to survive, fighting fiercely with the predators for control of the scattered herds. In one fierce series of battles, a tribe of ancient humans fought and destroyed a great nation of primal jackals—cunning creatures that had intelligence exceeding that of normal beasts. Alone and destitute, the few surviving jackals howled their fear and fury to the heavens, never suspecting that the primal spirit called Dark Sister would hear their cries. She gave the jackals her gifts, and they became jackalweres."

#8. Rot Grub

Why would anyone root around heaps of offal or dung in the first place—habitat of the rot grub—risking infection by D&D's version of hookworm or the candiru fish? Possibly to search for hidden treasure (more than a few creatures seemed to carry gems around in their gizzards), or perhaps for clues and

keys placed there by cruel DMs. Whatever the motivation for doing so, reach into a steaming pile of catoblepas dung and "these small creatures will viciously burrow into any living flesh which touches them, for they greatly enjoy such fare to dine upon."

Absent a *cure disease* spell, the only remedy was to apply fire to the wound (1-6 hit points damage per application, as the *Monster Manual* so helpfully stated). Otherwise, the rot grubs would quickly burrow to the heart and kill their host.

The *MM3* presents the further (and completely horrible) information that gnolls capture rot grubs and use them to torment captives in bizarre rites to Yeenoghu. Bugbears keep pits filled with rot grubs to dispose of corpses and make their traps more deadly. And kobolds brave and stupid enough to hunt these creatures sometimes keep them in small, ceramic containers they hurl at intruders (note: even worse than getting hit with a pee-filled balloon). While rot grub swarms are bad enough, just wait for the rot grub zombie, a corpse reanimated into a dark parody of life... and acts as a carrier for the swarm of rot grubs it carries around inside it.

#7. Su Monster

What could be tougher than a monster named Sue? ("It's the name that helped to make your strong.") One of the *Monster Manual*'s psionic critters, known for its terrifying appearance—dirty gray fur, black face, blood-red paws—as well as using its prehensile tails to hang upside down in order to freak out and attack with all four claws and its bite at once. "Su-monsters are at home upright or hanging upside down—the latter being one of their favorite methods of lurking for prey." Surprise!

2nd Edition added the legend that su monsters were magical hybrids of humans and apes, created by an evil wizard in order to guard his forest against psionic intruders. 4E slightly alters this legend. Su monsters now come from "the Isle of Dread, a jungle island based in the Feywild. A wizard named Halkith created the creatures to guard his tower from the island's other inhabitants, including yuan-ti and hostile humanoid tribes. To create su monsters, Halkith combined the intellect and cunning of primates with the strength and stealth of fey panthers."

#6. Nymph

"These beautiful, ever-young appearing women inhabit the loveliest of wilderness places, grottos in the sea, clear lakes and streams, and crystalline caverns. They dislike any form of intrusion, and they have means to prevent it." Boy, do they ever. Truth be told, this is probably my earliest memory of the game, listening to older kids in the neighborhood—clearly enthralled with the *Monster Manual*'s slightly risqué entries and artwork—breathlessly discussing that, "looking at [a nymph] will cause permanent blindness unless the onlookers save versus magic. If the nymph is nude or disrobes, an onlooker will die unless a saving throw versus magic is successful."

Approached carefully, nymphs might have been friendly, especially toward human males with 18 Charismas. Originating from the woodland spirits of myth and legend, nymphs have been expanded upon in *MM3*:

"The children of the four seasons and four wind brothers were the nymphs, fey beings who embody both their mothers' ties to the seasons and their fathers' fickle and tempestuous nature. The nymphs played with mortals, especially mortal men, toying with their minds and hearts, and they were pleased by such diverting toys. If the toys sometimes broke, what of it?"

Why settle for one lovely spirit? There are now spring, summer, autumn, and winter, as well as wood nymphs—each with their own unique powers. Consider the autumn nymph's wonderfully capricious power, whisper game:

Whisper Game (psychic) ✦ **Recharge** if the power misses
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). Until the end of the encounter or until the nymph drops to 0 hit points, whenever any creature saves against this ongoing damage, the nearest ally within 10 squares of it gains the ongoing damage. When the nymph drops to 0 hit points, the effect ends and the creature currently affected by the ongoing damage takes 15 psychic damage.

#5. Shadow

Between ghouls and ghasts in terms of undead toughness, shadows were creepy, nigh-invisible assassins found amidst ancient ruins, deep beneath the ground, or—presumably—anyplace dark enough to hide them. Shadows were shadowy in part because they existed on the Negative Energy plane, described (pleasantly enough) as "the place of anti-matter and negative force, the source of power for undead, the energy area from which evil grows."

This connection to the Negative Energy plane provided shadows their life-draining ability (imagine Blackrazor as an animate creature). They attacked living things in order to gain their life force, draining an opponent's Strength merely by touching them; if an opponent ever fell to 0 Strength, he'd become a new shadow . . . just like those slain by ghouls became new ghouls, further spreading undeath like some kind of disease or a game of all-in-tag.

In 2E, we further learned, "According to most knowledgeable sages, shadows appear to have been magically created, perhaps as part of some ancient curse laid upon some long-dead enemy. The curse affects only humans and demihumans, so it would seem that it affects the soul or the spirit. When victims can no longer resist, either through loss of consciousness (hit points) or physical prowess (Strength points), the curse is activated and the majority of the character's essence is shifted to the Negative Energy plane. Only a shadow of their former self remains on the Prime Material plane, and the transformation always renders the victim both terribly insane and undeniably evil."

In the *MM3*, shadows have moved from the Negative Energy plane to (where else?) the Shadowfell. They also now prey—not on one's life force—but on the shadows of living creatures, devouring them for sustenance. However, it cannot feast upon a shadow while the shadow's owner lives . . . .

#4. Intellect Devourer

Here's a bold claim for the 1st Edition Monster Manual to make: that these little walking brains were one of the most feared of monsters. But claim it they did, and here's why.

If you ever dared use psionics, the intellect devourer would quietly stalk after you, wait until you were alone—and then leap out and claw you to pieces. But the horror doesn't end there. Oh no. Far from it—the intellect devourer would then enter the victim's body, reading its thoughts as it feasted on its brain in order to reanimate the corpse and assume its identity. Why? In order to hunt and devour more victims, of course. These things were creepy enough for mind flayers to use them as watchdogs.

Beyond their nightmarish hunting methods, killing them was also no easy task. Fireballs were nothing more than bright light to them (but which did drive them away), and even *lightning bolts* caused little damage: 1 point per die. Back when certain creatures ignored mundane weapons, intellect devourers could only be hit by +3 weapons or better—and even then, they only caused 1 point of damage per hit!

In the *MM3*, several versions of the intellect devourer, including its ustilagor larval form, return. And while the intellect glutton can still animate dead, the intellect predator has the power to assume a living target:

Body Thief (charm, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one stunned creature); +17 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is dominated (save ends; the target takes a -2 penalty to the saving throw). While the target is dominated by the predator, the predator occupies the target's space and cannot be targeted or take damage. The predator cannot use claw while the target is dominated. When the target saves, the predator appears in the unoccupied space nearest to the target.
Aftereffect: The target is dazed (save ends).

#3. Catoblepas

Pliny the Elder described the catoblepas as holding its head ever downward lest it raise its eyes and kill those it looked upon, and with poisonous breath from its diet of toxic plants. Which is all far more creative than the common wildebeest actually being reported.

Several creatures from ancient and medieval bestiaries made their way into the *Monster Manual*, the catoblepas included. It may hold the distinction of being the ugliest creature in the book, "loathsome beyond description with no redeeming features. Its body resembles that of a huge, bloated buffalo and gives off an offensive odor. The catoblepas' neck is long and thin, and perched atop it is a big head uglier than that of a warthog. Its legs are thick and stumpy, much like a hippopotamus. The creature's tail is strong and snaky, however, and moves with amazing swiftness to strike enemies."

Forget about the tail, the catoblepas' real danger came from its gaze. Stumble on one by accident, and there was a 2 in 6 chance someone in the party would accidentally catch a peek—and die right there on the spot without a saving throw. Even running away with your eyes averted didn't help—its gaze could still kill you, although there was just a 25% chance the catoblepas could only muster enough strength to lift its anvil-heavy head and look your way . . . 10% if shambling after you.

Some misguided wizard may have been responsible for the su monster, the owl bear, and the peryton—but D&D's catoblepas was blamed on no less the ghastly tinkering with life by a demented godling. In the *MM3*, the catoblepas—still ugly enough to kill with its gaze—has been given a slightly more respectable place in the world. Instead of shuffling after fleeing adventurers trying to get them to look at it (an undignified situation for everyone involved), the catoblepas now serves as herald for the Raven Queen, plodding between worlds, surfacing unexpectedly.

#2. Quasit

Who'd want to adopt some lame cat, crow or screech owl for a familiar, when you could have one of these little demons instead? Granted, you had to be chaotic-evil or neutral-chaotic to be eligible (better than being a lawful-good and ending up with a brownie), as quasits made for the quintessential devil-on-your-shoulder... with the powers and drawbacks to match.

A quasit began life as a larva (the most selfishly evil of souls) transformed into this minor demon. In this form, it existed to serve the wicked master who summoned it—yet if its master died, and the quasit

succeeded in rushing his soul back to the Abyss, it would be rewarded accordingly. How so? If the master had been actively evil prior to death (at the quasit's relentless urging, no doubt), it would be transformed into a Type I or II demon; otherwise, it might go back to being a larva or another quasit.

To help aid their master, a quasit could even call upon the thinking power of a demon lord, with its ability to contact a lower plane once per week in order to decide some course of action ("Sorry to bother you Orcus, but which door should I open?"). They also possessed a diverse array of powers (polymorphing, invisibility, magic resistance, regeneration...) some of which their master even shared with the quasit around—including gaining 1 level. That's quite a bit better than a toad familiar's wide angle vision. Of course a toad isn't slavering after your soul, and if it dies you won't lose 4 levels.

While their stats appear in the MM3, quasits are still described as commonly serving as advisors to other beings. In this role, they target those who dabble in the occult, luring them to evil through the powers that lurk in forbidden texts, dark rituals, and cursed items. These tiny demons crave the destruction and chaos that spellcasters can unleash.

#1. Mimic

We've written extensively about the mimic, even dedicating a past D&D Alumni to these masters of the "gotcha" whether appearing as a treasure chest, gazebo, or any other object through the years. The mimic's been covered by Jared von Hindman's famous article (Celebrating 30 Years of Very Stupid Monsters)... twice actually, with the greater mimic appearing in Part 2. It's appeared in Topless Robot (slightly NSFW language). It earned a B- at The Book of Ratings. It's been the monster of the week at the Dice of Doom blog. You can find it discussed on Critical-Hits....

Well, like we've said, there's a lot that's been written about the mimic, so we'll pretty leave it at this: It's back, folks. The mimic is back.

Dark Sun Summer!

BY CHRIS TULACH

illustration by Eric L. Williams

Summer's almost here, and as usual, we have a lot of D&D fun ahead! Yes, you should get outside and enjoy the weather, but when you need your D&D game fix, we have it in spades. There's so much to talk about, but let's just start with what's coming up in June for now . . . .

June 9: D&D Encounters: *Dark Sun* Begins!

If you haven't heard the news, our D&D Encounters in-store play experience is taking off, and a new season begins on June 9. We started off with Undermountain, which is nearing its season finale in the next few weeks. Response to our new Wednesday D&D program has been overwhelming. Players from around the world are participating in a weekly in-store campaign that plays out in one-encounter sessions, taking one to two hours each. It's a great way to play in a regular D&D game without straining your schedule.

For those who haven't yet experienced D&D Encounters, love *Dark Sun*, or are veteran players wanting to continue their in-store play, you'll want to mark June 9th as the day to head to your local store. That's when we launch an exciting preview campaign of the *Dark Sun* campaign world! Return to the fan-favorite world of Athas, explore the savage environment and terrible dangers of a blasted land, and do it all months before the books are available.

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This upcoming season, you'll receive pregenerated characters to play for the duration of the 15-week campaign, which ends on September 15. Every five sessions of play equals one chapter in the story; you can take a short rest between sessions but can take an extended rest only after the chapter concludes. You'll want to show up every week, because we have a compelling adventure in *Fury of the Wastewalker*. This adventure will take you all around the Tyr Region, giving you a classic *Dark Sun* feel of gritty survival and bold action. Here's a little bit more on the adventure to whet your appetite:

Fury of the Wastewalker

On a trade road to the city-state of Tyr, a caravan is assaulted by a deadly obsidian shardstorm. The survivors are forced to band together and navigate the wastes to safety. But the force of nature that destroyed the caravan is under the malevolent control of the being known as the Wastewalker, who will stop at nothing to see the end of those that escaped his initial wrath. Can the heroes reach the Ringing Mountains before it's too late?

Characters will be provided for this season, and will include all sorts of great previews of new races and other cool rules options that will appear in the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*. The thri-kreen and mul are back—and they're playable characters in this season! Every character also has one of the new theme options (like gladiator or wasteland nomad), which better define a character's role in the setting. Since you'll be playing these characters for the duration of the season, we've also given them great backgrounds and roleplaying hooks that help to integrate them into the story of the adventure.

Want to DM? D&D Encounters is the best way to jump into it. With only one encounter a week to prepare and the materials you need to run it (adventure, maps, and tokens) all provided, DMing couldn't be easier. In addition, DMs get cool and useful rewards to help them run their games just for providing players a good time! In D&D Encounters: Undermountain, we gave DMs a pack of cards with all the conditions in the D&D game on them, and the demand has been so overwhelming for more that we've included this reward again in this season's kit!

Our kits for the first season of D&D Encounters ran out, so make sure to remind your local store to ensure they've signed up for this season—it will be hot!

If you need more information on the D&D Encounters program, you can check out the D&D Encounters website or head to the D&D Community Group page for basic program information. Make sure that a store near you is participating!

June 19: Free RPG Day

If you want even more *Dark Sun* goodness before the books hit in August, head back into your local participating game store for the Free RPG Day giveaway! Free RPG Day is a hobby game industry event that allows you to pick up a cool game adventure from some of your favorite publishers. Wizards has participated in this event since 2008. This year, each store participating in Free RPG Day will receive a new *Dark Sun* adventure folio called *Bloodsand Arena*, which includes two mini-adventures, character cards, and a double-sided poster map featuring a gladiatorial arena!

That's all for this month. Next month, we'll talk about our upcoming big summer conventions and how we're supporting smaller ones with our new convention support! Stay cool while you're exploring Athas!

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, Chris Tulach actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has become the D&D Organized Play Content Developer, responsible for the development and deployment of Dungeons & Dragons organized play programs, including D&D Encounters. He is also the co-author of E2 *Kingdom of the Ghouls*.

Rule Updates

BY ANDY COLLINS AND GREG BILSLAND

Whether you call them patches or errata or some word we can't print on our family-friendly site, updates to existing game rules or game elements are an inevitable part of any game that has a lot of moving parts interacting in a complex way. Updates for the D&D roleplaying game date back to the earliest rulebooks. For example, errata for the 1st Edition *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* appeared in issue #35 of *Dragon* Magazine (cover date March 1980).

In this installment of Design and Development, editor Greg Bilsland and 4th Edition co-designer (and current manager of RPG development and editing) Andy Collins discuss the topic of D&D rules updates.

AC: Why does R&D issue updates? To some gamers, the very concept of an update conjures up a storm of negative emotions. "I can't believe you're changing the way my character works! Why couldn't you have gotten it right in the first place?"

GB: Exactly—and believe me, if there was no need to update the material, that would make everyone's life easier. With the amount of content that goes through design, development, and editing every month, though, some things are bound to slip through. The update process is our failsafe. It lets us make tweaks and adjustments based on combinations we didn't anticipate. In the case of the earlier books—*Adventurer's Vault*, *Martial Power*, *Player's Handbook*, etc.—even we professionals were still learning to work with the new rules, so some problematic design elements crept in.

AC: In some cases, an update fixes a typographical or grammatical error or fills in missing information that renders a part of the game unclear or even unplayable. How many squares does that power let me move? What defense does this power attack? What kind of damage does this power deal?

GB: Those are the easiest errors to fix. I remember when *Divine Power* came out, people looked at *solar wrath* and wondered how long the effect lasted. Although we (R&D) might take for granted that an encounter power's effect almost always lasts until the end of the user's next turn, many players have no way of knowing that, so until we issue an update, people have to guess at how long it lasts.

AC: These updates are crucial to the reader's understanding of how the game functions—without the update, the reader can only guess at what's intended. These are the most annoying issues to deal with, because they remind us of our own human flaws. No matter how many hours one spends with a manuscript, sometimes the brain tricks us by filling in a word or number that isn't really on the page. Even playtesting doesn't catch all of these errors, since the tyranny of the publication schedule means that playtesters rarely work from finished documents.

Update or Clarification?

GB: Of course, not all updates are so cut-and-dried. The update review group, consisting of myself, Jeremy Crawford, and a Customer Service representative, evaluates which issues merit update and which issues should go into the FAQ or simply be noted for correction in the next printing (such as a misspelled word). For example, we addressed an issue with the Undaunted paragon path feature ("You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws and to all defenses against fear effects") on the FAQ, because although a reasonable reader could incorrectly assume the saving throw bonus as only applying to fear effects, a simple clarification sufficed. This distinction can be a fine line, but we prefer to only update the items that are critical for clarity and rules balance.

AC: Unreasonable readers are another issue entirely; while we endeavor to make the game as, um, "idiot-proof" as we can, there's a limit to the linguistic knots we'll weave to make the rules 100 percent immune to willful misreading. At a certain point, one simply has to accept that some folks will see what they want to see and focus our attention on more important issues.

GB: Speaking of prioritization . . . we try to avoid issuing updates based entirely on "theorycraft:" that is, a player picking the right set of 15 feats, getting the right epic destiny, paragon path, set of items, and powers all to generate a "nova" combination.

AC: That said, within those builds—or within the willful misreading of rules I mentioned earlier—there often lies a nugget of truth, some legitimate problem that merits review.

GB: For example, some item properties are written ambiguously, making it unclear when you gain their benefits. We updated the *staff of ruin* for clarification, because even a reasonable player could misread it to work with the Dual-Implement Spell-

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caster feat. People tend to want general rules that they can apply across the game, but that's dangerous, because it can have a cascading effect. Instead, we err toward more surgical updates. When we alter a general rule, it is part of a much larger and longer process that usually involves the release of a core book.

AC: Even though nobody likes the need for such clarifications, folks generally approve of the intent behind them. After all, most gamers would rather be able to play the game than argue about a rule's intent.

Pulling Out the Nerf Bat

AC: The next category of updates, however, touches on a tender topic: the deliberate reduction in potency of overpowered options, known colloquially as "nerfing."

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GB: Even though the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game has a strong mechanical framework behind its powers, monsters, and other elements, game balance remains as much art as science. Inevitably, the end results you see on the page represent a "best guess" based on logical argument, experience playing the game, comparison with similar options, playtester feedback, and sheer intuition. From time to time, those guesses land a little too far on the "too powerful" side of the equation.

AC: Not every good choice is "too powerful." An option only becomes problematic—or "broken," as the kids like to say—when it begins to crowd out the other choices available in the same category. If every wizard takes the same 1st-level encounter attack spell, that decision point ceases to be an interesting choice, which means we need to take a hard look at that spell. After all, what's the point of asking a player to make a choice if there's only one right answer?

GB: That's part of the reason we do more *nerfing* than we do . . . wait, what would be the opposite of "nerfing?"

AC: Improving? Buffing? Anti-nerfing?

GB: Or whatever. We do more nerfing than anti-nerfing because, frankly, underpowered options rarely have an impact on the game. Having one choice that isn't as good as five others on the same list doesn't make the other five broken, it just means that players ignore that underpowered choice except in occasional corner cases.

AC: Sometimes, the individual game element itself isn't the problem. It's how that element interacts with other elements that creates the issue. Our game has an endless list of exceptions to the otherwise relatively basic rules of play. Every feat, power, magic item, class feature, ritual, monster, trap, and terrain feature changes the way the game works in a small way. When you start combining those elements, you can't help but find an unintended interaction. Some of those are harmless side effects, but others are "hacks" that not only subvert the intent of the designer but also actively work against a fun experience at the table.

GB: We use the update process to clear up these problem combos—preferably with the simplest solution possible—in order to restore a balance of fun at the table.

Recent Updates

AC: Many readers have noticed that we've taken a more aggressive approach to update publication in the last half-year or so. That's intentional, as we increased the priority of this aspect of our work in 2009.

GB: In other words, Andy told me it was important.

AC: I've always felt that our update procedure was a crucial part of the publishing process. Back when I worked in the trenches of the development team, it was part of my domain . . . and I never got to spend as much time on it as I wanted. Once I had the authority to re-prioritize such things, I found the right folks to take charge of rebuilding the entire process from the ground up. That started with casting a wider net for input and eventually resulted in a more assertive publication schedule.

GB: In 2010, we're aiming to increase our schedule from about three updates per year to six. Happily, the number of updates required for recent releases has gone down as we've improved our ability to catch problems before they reach the page. Furthermore, as we tie up loose ends in the older books, we anticipate the overall quantity to slow down.

AC: That said, we continue to adjust the update process based on community response, the product array, and the realities of our own schedules. Updates can't ever take a higher priority than publishing the next book, so sometimes I have to tell Greg or Jeremy to hold off on a particular fix in order to finish a current assignment.

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GB: We're also tweaking format and presentation. With the May update release, we've adjusted the presentation to make it easier for players to sort out new updates or access updates for the book they need.

AC: We greatly appreciate the feedback that you've sent us on the update process, both positive and negative.

GB: In fact, we've been pleasantly surprised by the positive reception our recent, more aggressive updates have gotten among the D&D community. Sometimes this can feel like a game of whack-a-mole, but when you remind us that our work leads to a more balanced, more fun play experience, it helps us keep going.

AC: Dungeons & Dragons is, at its heart, a living game. It evolves in fits and starts from month to month, year to year, edition to edition. A robust update process is part of this evolution, and it reminds everyone to not sit quietly and endure problematic issues but rather to speak up and lobby for improvement.

GB: Thanks to digital tools such as the Character Builder, we can seamlessly integrate these updates in a way never before available to the tabletop RPG player.

AC: No matter how talented our designers, developers, and editors become, until someone invents a method of assigning an infinite amount of time to every project, we'll never escape the need for updates. Therefore, we'll keep improving the update process to ensure that everyone gets to have fun at the table. Look for more news and insights on our update process in upcoming Design & Development columns, and don't forget to send your update-related queries to Customer Service.

About the Authors

Andy Collins co-designed the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons game, and works for Wizards of the Coast as the Manager of Development and Editing for RPG R&D. His credits stretch back a decade and include *Magic Item Compendium*, *Draconomicon*, *Unearthed Arcana*, and the *Epic Level Handbook*.

Greg Bilsland is a game editor at Wizards of the Coast. His design credits include the *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*, *Monster Manual 2*, *Divine Power*, and *Primal Power*. His recent editing credits include *Player's Handbook 2*, *Monster Manual 2*, and the *Eberron Player's Guide*. He welcomes anyone to keep up with his work at twitter.com/gregbilsland.

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Revising the Monster Stat Block

BY ANDY COLLINS AND GREG BILSLAND

By now, many of you have gotten a glimpse of the new stat block design that's debuting officially in *Monster Manual 3*. This new presentation first appeared in Bill Slavicsek's March Ampersand column and is previewed in the new D&D adventure HS1: The Slaying Stone. In this column, Andy Collins and Greg Bilsland give you a peek behind the curtain at the process that brought changes to the familiar 4th Edition monster stat block format.

AC: As many projects do, the revision of the D&D monster stat block began small. I asked *Monster Manual 3* lead editor Greg Bilsland to find a way to incorporate rules-intensive keywords and terms (such as "swarm" and "variable resistance") into the body of a stat block. I was tired of trying to remember the timing for variable resistance, and who else forgets that swarms can't be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks?

GB: As I incorporated a few glossary terms into the stat blocks, I immediately became concerned about the length of the stat blocks. They often have limited space, especially when four or five monsters need to fit on a spread, and some of the keyword definitions were five or six lines long.

AC: Greg's concern about the effect this change would have on the size of stat blocks was a reasonable point. Despite our increasing forays into online distribution of content, we're still largely beholden to the size of the page. Sometimes, good ideas are shelved simply because they don't fit well in a book.

That, however, wasn't an acceptable reason to avoid this change. A stat block with too much hidden information—such as a keyword that makes you consult a glossary to understand—is simply unfair to the average Dungeon Master. Adventures reprint stat blocks, but they don't reprint glossaries. Who wants to stop the game to look up whether an ooze can move at full speed when squeezing? If some stat blocks got larger because of this change, we'd just have to take that into account when designing and developing monsters (and editing books). If a monster had so many of these glossary keywords and terms that it became too complex to print (or to run in combat), that was no different than giving it too many powers.

GB: Once we agreed on the direction, my first step was to go through the glossary of *Monster Manual 2* and build a list of terms that we might want to define. Some of the choices were obvious: ooze, swarm, aquatic, all-around vision. All these keywords had effects in combat that were easy to miss. I know that more than once I've forgotten that a creature with all-around vision can't be flanked.

AC: As it turns out, when you're the Manager of D&D Development and Editing, you don't have to accept those frustrations with your RPG experiences—you get to tell people to find a new solution.

GB: During this search, we discussed where to draw the line on defining terms in a stat block. Would we define special movement modes, such as climb or burrow? What about threatening reach? Resist and vulnerable? Earth walk? Hover?

AC: We ended up compromising on several points. Certain terms, such as resist, were deemed so commonplace (and already intuitively presented) that they didn't require any further definition in the stat block. Any term that didn't have combat implications—such as origin or type keywords—could reside solely in the glossary. And so on.

GB: As I thought about how to present keywords in the stat block, it kicked off a larger discussion of overall stat block improvement.

AC: To be honest, I expected a larger discussion to arise from my small challenge. Nonetheless, I wanted to start small rather than proposing a wholesale revision to the stat block. Change makes most people uncomfortable, and sometimes you need to ease your way into a project involving change so folks don't get defensive.

GB: Admittedly, I'd wondered for a long time how we could parse information better in monster stat blocks. Monsters had abilities akin to PC racial traits, but in monster stat blocks, nothing called attention to them. We didn't even know exactly what to call them. They typically got exiled to the bottom of the stat block along with utility powers, where they were likely to go unnoticed, despite being relevant to combat.

AC: The monster stat block is the most frequently referenced user interface that a DM uses in the game. We've become much more cognizant of the importance of UI design over the past few years: a result not only of our increased reliance on digital tools but also from our experiences with well-designed (and, yes, poorly designed) game UI from all media.

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GB: The 4th Edition monster stat block already represented a significant evolutionary step in presenting combat information. Andy challenged me to make it even better.

AC: Greg's first forays into stat block revision were positive but cautious. I pushed him to experiment with layout, typography, symbols, and anything else he could think of to help communicate key information to the DM. My philosophy in developmental changes—whether with character powers or, as here, with UI—is that you can't know if you've gone far enough until you've gone too far. Then you can bring it back a notch or two to the right solution.

GB: The idea to call out traits in the monster stat block inspired the discussion to subdivide the stat block in some new way. Initially, I brought forward the idea of more formally dividing the stat block by usage (at-will, recharge, encounter) than it already was.

AC: However, we soon realized that what the stat block really needed was to help the DM build each monster's set of actions for its turn. The best way to do that was to group monster powers by the action type required to use them—Standard, Move, and Minor. The DM could easily see all the monster's options for each of its three available actions, and thereby build the monster's turn more easily.

GB: Dividing those three actions was pretty easy. The tricky part was how to group (or split up) the various other actions: reactions, interrupts, opportunity actions, and free actions. Sometimes a creature had many different types of these miscellaneous actions, and we balked at adding a header for each of these categories. We eventually realized that the organization most useful to a DM was a grouping of all triggered actions together under a header called exactly that: Triggered Actions.

AC: Though it seems obvious in retrospect, this was a big breakthrough. Suddenly, what was once a seemingly random list of powers and abilities became a set of categorized lists of traits, standard actions, move actions, minor actions, and triggered actions (the ones that we DMs so often forget when they're simply another entry in a long list of powers). Most monsters wouldn't have entries in all these categories—plenty of simple critters have only one or two standard actions and nothing else—but the vast majority of monsters suddenly became significantly easier to understand.

This organization also meant it would be easier for developers to see at a glance what the monster was supposed to do on its turn. If a creature had five options for its standard action and none for its other actions, we could rapidly identify that it probably had too many eggs in that basket. Could one or two of those standard actions become minor or triggered instead, thereby making each round more interesting?

GB: But we were still far from a finished stat block. Andy also challenged me to reexamine the organization of data in each power. Were we providing information—range, targets, keywords, effects, etc.—in the right order? Were we making too many assumptions (such as "everybody knows that a melee attack targets a single creature")?

AC: This became perhaps the most contentious issue in the entire process. We couldn't afford the space that character powers used, so some sacrifices to clarity were necessary. Ultimately, this would become the part of the process that tested Greg's patience and enthusiasm the most. For a couple weeks, each day brought a new method of organizing the information in a monster's power entry, and each time I provided feedback that pushed it in a slightly different direction.

GB: I broke information into separate lines, like character powers, but that took up too much space. I put more information into parenthetical entries, but that looked cluttered and confusing. I used right-justification of some information to help call it out, but we decided it required too much back-and-forth scanning of the page. Ironically, early in the process, I proposed an "Attack" line much like the one we adopted for the final format, but it was rejected at that time because it meant an "Attack" line for a monster would contain different information than it would for an adventurer (which some folks preferred to avoid).

AC: At this point, the project had to expand to include more sets of eyes than just mine and Greg's: we were too close to the trees to see the whole forest any more. In addition to soliciting feedback from other editors and Dungeon Masters in the department, we even conscripted outside playtesters whose sole responsibility was to run encounters using various new stat block formats.

GB: Overall, reactions to the new stat block were positive. Users liked the grouping of Traits above the power listings; one version had Traits at the bottom, but down there they were too easily overlooked.

AC: Pulling text out of the top section of the stat block (the area where hit points and defenses reside) also improved clarity and playability. Auras, in particular, had a tendency to bloat that top section. Reserving it primarily for combat numbers and start-of-encounter info (such as initiative and Perception) helped a lot.

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THANKS PLAYTESTERS!

As exciting as it may sound to get an early look at a project, playtesting isn't necessarily a glamorous endeavor. You're basically giving up the freedom of doing whatever you want in your D&D game so that you can test a new class, a new adventure, or in this case, a specific set of monsters using the new format. Then you have to answer a bunch of questions about your experiences.

Despite these requirements, we were fortunate to have a couple groups agree to playtest the new monster format on short notice, running newly created characters through a set of encounters drawn from *Dungeon Delve* and using a version of the new stat block format. Here's a list of the helpful folks (divided by gaming group) who pitched in to ensure that MM3 would have a great new format:

Konrad Brandemuhl, Travis Wolcott, Keith Symcox, Paul Alexander, Tyler Burroughs, Sean Herring

Christian Chaney, Joanna Chaney, Daniel Gordon, Jodi Gordon, Christopher Wright, Danny Joe Jarman Jr.

Sean Molley, Heidi Pritchett, Brian Schoner, Paige Leitman, Bryan Leclair, Dee Leclair

Renout van Rijn, Mark Knobbe, John-Alan Pascoe, Yourik Voogd, Eva Orta, Yannick Braat, Pieter Sleijpen

GB: Playtesters widely approved of our new organization of monster powers by action type. Their feedback also helped tweak some of the presentation issues that we'd been debating.

AC: Playtesting also identified some changes that weren't helping enough to merit their inclusion. For example, we had experimented with adding a few more symbols to the game to help identify common triggers or powers. While the aura icon stuck around, our symbols for "triggered when a monster first becomes bloodied" and "triggered when a monster drops to 0 hp" ended up being more distracting than helpful.

GB: We also tried using passive Perception at the top of the stat block (rather than the monster's skill modifier). Reviewers were split on this change, so we rejected it.

AC: Other "extreme" changes that we nixed included using a fixed initiative score for each creature (rather than an initiative modifier) and removing ability scores (and leaving just the total modifiers). In every case, for every person who really liked the change, two or three (or ten) people found it jarring. In the end, I decided that we should stick with the changes that we felt were most important and useful rather than cluttering the issue with less crucial alterations.

GB: After many weeks of discussions, experiments, and playtesting, we had our new stat block format. Of course, the editors still had plenty of work in front of them converting the development turnover into the new format. Some powers and traits needed help before they could fit into the format. Unexpected questions popped up, sometimes requiring us to re-evaluate decisions we'd made earlier.

AC: Despite what readers may be thinking, I didn't get every change I wanted. In some places, folks talked me out of ideas that I'd proposed. In a lot of other places, people came up with answers that I hadn't even considered when I first challenged Greg. That's part of our team-based, consensus approach to project development—we get a lot of smart people thinking and talking about a problem, propose a lot of solutions, and hammer on them until we find the right one.

GB: It was a lot of work—more than I'd expected when I accepted the lead editor assignment for *Monster Manual 3*. But in the end, we had a book that we felt would be friendlier to DMs and easier to use in play than any collection of monsters we'd ever published.

AC: That makes all the long hours and the many iterations of stat blocks worthwhile, right Greg?

About the Authors

Andy Collins co-designed the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons game. His credits stretch back a decade and include *Magic Item Compendium*, *Draconomicon*, *Unearthed Arcana*, and the *Epic Level Handbook*.

Greg Bilsland is a game editor at Wizards of the Coast. His design credits include the *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*, *Monster Manual 2*, *Divine Power*, *Primal Power*. His recent editing credits include *Player's Handbook 2*, *Monster Manual 2*, and the *Eberron Player's Guide*. He welcomes anyone to keep up with his work at twitter.com/gregbilsland.

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